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Version: Version of Record

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:

<http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21954/ou.ro.0000f120>

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Exploring Teachers' Beliefs about Teacher Research

Submitted by

Subhi Ashour

to the Open University as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Research in Education,
August 2012.

Date of Submission: 1 September 2012
Date of Award: 7 December 2012

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore teachers' beliefs and conceptions about teacher research in Syrian tertiary English language teaching contexts. Questionnaires, follow-up interviews and written follow-up were used to collect the data. This research serves as an introductory study for further research on teachers' beliefs and conceptions about research. 52 English language teachers participated in this study and the data was analysed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. The main themes in this study were included in the questionnaire so these were used as bedrock where relevant data from interviews and written follow-up were collated to provide a deeper and more comprehensive account of the participants' beliefs and practices concerning research and the impact of research on their teaching practices.

The findings revealed that the teachers have diverse conceptions of research. On the one hand, positivistic research was seen as the model of how research should be; however, on the other hand, a simpler version of research, called 'informal research', was practised instead. The research culture as captured in this study was shown to be not conducive to engagement in research due to administrative lack of support. In this regard, this study has considerable potential in the design for future research to more fully understand teachers' beliefs and conceptions about research and their engagement/lack of engagement in research.

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List of Key Abbreviations

BERA: British Educational Research Association

CELTA: Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

DELTA: Diploma in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

ELT: English Language Teaching

IELTS: International English Language Testing System

TOEFL: Test of English as a Foreign Language

TR: Teacher Research

Chapter 1: Aims and Objectives

1.1 Introduction

This dissertation explores Teacher Research (henceforth TR) in Syrian tertiary English language teaching contexts. It is motivated by both my previous studies as an M.Ed student and my work as an English language teacher in higher education contexts in Syria. My passion for TR grew out of the discrepancy between theory and practice. As I will discuss in chapter 2, TR is advocated in the literature as a sustainable teacher development activity. In practice, however, and at least in the context of this study (Syria), TR is still an unfamiliar activity among university teachers and mainly associated with student teachers who are required to conduct assessed research as part of their initial teacher training or postgraduate programmes. Another relevant source of inspiration for this study is my belief in the need to acknowledge teachers as ‘reflective knowers’, knowledge builders and practitioners. If we understand the role of research to be the production of knowledge (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:15) and the improvement of practice and influencing policy (Pring, 2004:133), then the stance this study takes is that teachers themselves are capable of producing knowledge that is not only relevant to their work but also helps them learn through reflection and understand more about their practices and grow professionally. It is my stance in this study that an insider perspective of teachers’ inquiry (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 2009a:16) makes the knowledge teachers build and disseminate more relevant to teachers and perhaps policymakers than that produced by outside academic researchers. In this study, research, or inquiry, is seen as stance or way of teaching (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 2009a) rather than an extraneous, one-off pursuit. In other words, teachers use research as an emancipatory tool that enables them to systematically reflect on their practice and ultimately understand and improve it throughout their careers.

This chapter introduces my study by outlining its general aims and objectives and discussing its context. The chapter concludes with a brief overview of the remaining chapters.

1.2 Aims of the Study

The study sets out to investigate a group of EFL teachers’ beliefs in higher education contexts in Syria. The exact focus is on beliefs related to the role of research engagement (reading and doing) in teachers’ reflective practices as a tool of professional development

and a source of professional learning. Beliefs in this study are conceptualised as being psychological and mental constructs that consciously or otherwise influence and guide practice (see chapter 2). It is also hoped that this study will investigate congruence or otherwise between knowledge and beliefs (see chapter 2) and how teachers deal with discrepancies between knowledge and beliefs on the one hand and beliefs and practices on the other. Another aim of this study is to understand the contribution - and perhaps relevance - that TR and reflection on practice have in regard to knowledge building for working teachers in higher education in Syria. An ultimate aim in this study is to understand Syrian English language teachers' research engagement or lack of it and the possible contextual factors behind the engagement or its absence. My position in this study is that beliefs are the starting point of any endeavour to understand teachers' practices, ways of thinking, decision-making processes and knowledge construction.

1.3 Context

1.3.1 Background

This study is based on data collected from three universities in Syria: two public and one private. All three universities offer English language courses for a variety of learners such as university students, university academics and staff, and for a variety of purposes including English for academic purposes, general English, standardised tests preparation (such as IELTS, and TOEFL) and English for specific purposes (such as business English, English for science). The study has been conducted at the time of political unrest in the country and this has undoubtedly impacted on many of the research decisions as I will discuss in chapter 3. However, and for the purpose of this chapter, it should be acknowledged that the social, cultural and political situations surrounding the study impinge heavily on the way the research proceeds and my research decisions as I will show in chapters 4 and 5. Simply put, this study, like similar research on teacher beliefs, has been shaped by its context and particularly the political situation at the time of conducting this research; however, the context in this study has been a determining factor in most of the research decisions as I will discuss in chapter 3.

1.3.2 Participants

The participants in this study are 52 English language teachers at three universities. These 3 universities are in the same city and most of the teachers in this study were working part-

time for two of these three universities at the time of conducting the study. The majority of the participants (N=35) have Master's degrees in English language teaching which implies they are familiar to a certain extent with research. I personally know the teachers from one university which facilitated the process of recruiting participants. I also managed to recruit additional participants from the other two universities through personal contacts (see chapter 4 for more on participant recruitment). A number of variables among the participants, such as age, qualifications and work status have been captured as they were thought to be relevant.

1.4 Overview of Chapters

This dissertation is comprised of six chapters broadly organised into the following three sections: section 1 (chapters 1-3) introduces the study and its context, discusses its relation to existing knowledge and the methodology and research design; section 2 (chapters 4 & 5) presents the data, analysis and findings; and section 3 (chapter 6) discusses the implications and limitations.

Chapter 2 discusses some of the literature pertinent to the study and identifies the need to conduct this research. Chapter 3 discusses the methodology and data collection process. Chapter 4 presents the data with preliminary analysis. Chapter 5 is dedicated to more in-depth analysis, interpretations and findings. Chapter 6 discusses the limitations and implications for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

As explained in chapter 1, the aim of this study is to examine teachers' beliefs about research, its nature and value. To this end, this chapter explores the concept of teachers' beliefs, highlighting its definition, significance, relation to practice and relevance to teacher education. The second theme explored is teacher research looking at its definition, types, potentials and obstacles. The chapter concludes with a rationale for studying beliefs about teacher research that positions my study in relation to other studies reported in the literature.

2.2 Beliefs

2.2.1 Teachers' Beliefs

Several definitions have been proposed for the concept of beliefs in the teacher education literature which show the non-consensual dynamic nature of beliefs. Pajares (1992), for example, called beliefs 'messy constructs', asserting that '[a]s a global construct, belief does not lend itself easily to empirical investigation' (1992:308). Also, Dewey (1933) explained beliefs as a way of thinking that 'covers all the matters of which we have no sure knowledge and yet which we are sufficiently confident of to act upon and also the matters that we now accept as certainly true, as knowledge, but which nevertheless may be questioned in the future'(1933:6). Scholars in their pursuit to pinpoint beliefs have come up with various terms denoting multiple understandings and orientations. Among the terms and definitions used in defining beliefs, according to Borg's (2006) review, are 'ways of thinking and understanding' (Nespor, 1987); 'personal knowledge and implicit assumptions'(Kagan, 1992); 'implicit theories' (Clark, 1988); 'knowledge that enables an individual to meet goals in specific circumstances' (Tobin and Lamaster, 1995); 'preconception and implicit theories'(Crawley and Salyer, 1995); 'convictions or opinions'(Ford, 1994); 'attitudes and values'(Pajares, 1993); 'opinions and ideas' (Kalaja and Barcelos, 2003), to mention but a few. Richardson (1996a) puts forth another definition arguing that beliefs are 'psychologically held understandings, premises and propositions about the world that are felt to be true' (1996a:103).

The vast array of terms makes it rather difficult to decide whether the diversity of the definitions should be seen as a virtue or otherwise. On the one hand, such diversity is

probably justifiable knowing that the concept under consideration is highly elastic and complex. The difficulty in studying beliefs could be partly ascribed to the difficulty of accessing them with any certitude in the first place (Thompson, 1992). Also, the fact that the study of beliefs is cross-disciplinary in nature- beliefs are well studied in psychology, philosophy, anthropology, sociology, religion and education- brings a wide range of diversity of meanings depending on where the investigator stands and also on his or her purpose behind investigating beliefs. On the other hand this diversity and lack of consensus has its own problems. Defining the same concept in different ways using different terms could mean there is no common ground for scholars to start from. This has also led to a variety in research methods and designs to investigate beliefs according to what the researcher understands by 'beliefs'. Self-report, verbal commentaries, observation, semi-structured interviews and reflective writing are among the methods used to investigate beliefs (Borg, 2006:168, 205). Simply put, beliefs mean many things to many people and from this basis, investigating them will likely yield results and findings in line with the investigator's own understanding of this concept.

A recurrent comparison in the beliefs literature is one between 'knowledge' and 'beliefs'. As highlighted above, some scholars use the term knowledge, whether implicit or personal, to define beliefs. The point here is that knowledge, a supposedly more familiar concept, is used to juxtapose belief and, therefore, explain its nature. Abelson (1979) talked about beliefs as forming systems- which are 'dynamic in nature, undergoing change and restructuring as individuals evaluate their beliefs against their experiences' (Thompson, 1992). Belief systems, unlike knowledge systems are non-consensual, rely heavily on evaluative and affective components, include episodic materials and held with varying degrees of certitude (Abelson, 1979:356-360). Nespore added 'unboundedness' to Abelson's list to emphasise that belief systems are 'loosely-bounded systems with highly variable and uncertain linkages to events, situations and knowledge systems'(1987:321). Scheffler's argument was that knowledge is equal to a claim to facts and truth: '[k]nowing, [...] is incompatible with being wrong or mistaken and when I describe someone as knowing, I commit myself to his [*sic*] not being mistaken ... knowing unlike believing, has independent factual reference'(1965:23). Interestingly, though, Thompson (1992) highlighted the point that knowledge and beliefs are not static:

[t]he evidence against which a claim to knowing is evaluated may change over time as old theories are replaced by new ones. [...] Therefore, what may have been rightfully claimed as knowledge at one

time, may in light of later theories, be judged as belief. Inversely, a once-held belief, with time, may be accepted as knowledge, in light of new supporting theories. (1992:130)

Perhaps the distinction between knowledge and beliefs is at certain points a hair-splitting business, adding complication to an already complex matter. As Pajares (1992) puts it when commenting on the distinctions between knowledge and beliefs made by some researchers, it is 'difficult to pinpoint where knowledge ended and belief began and the authors suggested that most of the constructs were simply different words meaning the same thing' (1992:309).

Drawing on my synthesis of the literature thus far, my working definition of beliefs in teacher education is as follows:

Beliefs are mental constructs with affective loading. They are the result of an individual's personal history, culture, education and experience; therefore, they are personally configured and of specific significance to the person who holds them. Beliefs are likely to guide and define practice.

2.2.2 The Significance of Studying Teachers' Beliefs

The study of beliefs was anticipated to be the 'focus of teacher effectiveness research' (Fenstermacher, 1978:169). A significant factor behind the resurgence of interest in studying teachers' beliefs and cognition around this time and following Fenstermacher's observation was due to the growing interest in the social constructionist theory (Roberts, 1998) and, more importantly, to an influential paradigm shift. This shift is characterised by a move from a process-product mechanist approach to teaching, focusing mainly on teachers' behaviours and effectiveness to an approach which has teachers' thinking and decision-making processes as its main foci (Clark and Peterson, 1986, Thompson, 1992, Richards et al., 2001). Borg in most of his work (Borg, 2003b, a, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009a, b, 2010, 2011) uses the term 'teacher cognition' as an umbrella term encompassing beliefs, thinking and knowing. On the importance of studying teachers' beliefs and cognition in general, though not directly related to teachers' beliefs about research, Borg argues that:

A key factor in the growth of teacher cognition research has been the realization that we cannot properly understand teachers and teaching without understanding the thoughts, knowledge and beliefs

that influence what teachers do. Similarly, in teacher education, we cannot make adequate sense of teachers' experiences of learning to teach without examining the unobservable mental dimension of this learning process. Teacher cognition research, by providing insights into teachers' mental lives and into the complex ways in which these relate to teachers' classroom practices, has made a significant contribution to our understandings of the process of becoming, being and developing professionally as a teacher. (2009: 163)

A further potential in studying teachers' beliefs about research is that it helps uncover what lies between theory and practice. In other words, there is normally a gap between what teachers are supposed to do- through their professional development preparation and training programmes, management recommendations - and what they actually do. Investigating the 'tension' (Golombek, 1998) between beliefs and practice is productive in 'advancing our understanding of the complex relationship between these phenomena' (Phipps and Borg, 2009:388). The implication for professional development programmes is that 'professional development which engages in direct exploration of [...] beliefs and principles may provide the opportunity for greater self-awareness through reflection and critical questioning as starting points for later adaptations' (Richards et al., 2001:42). Similarly, Breen et al (2001) in their investigation of teachers' classroom principles and decision-making processes, conclude that:

it is possible that forms of reflective dialogue of the kind adopted in our research among providers and recipients of in-service courses may explore the actual extent of relatively individualistic constructions of the role of the language teacher as compared with approaches or methods in language teaching that exemplify current 'taken for granted' within the profession' (2001:497)

In short '[a]ttention to the beliefs of teachers and teacher candidates can inform educational practice in ways that prevailing research agendas have not and cannot' (Pajares, 1992).

Based on the literature reviewed in this section, the aim of this study is to focus on uncovering teachers' beliefs and attempting to understand their influence on practice and how this does/does not influence their decisions to engage/not engage in forms of TR.

2.3 Teacher Research

2.3.1 Defining Teacher Research

Similar to the concept of beliefs, teacher research is also defined using various terms. Among the terms used are 'action research' (Elliott, 1991, Zeichner, 1993), 'practitioner

research' (Zeichner and Noffke, 2001), 'collaborative inquiry' (Bray et al., 2000), critical inquiry (Aaron et al., 2006), 'self-study' (Bullough and Pinnegar, 2001), 'teacher-research' (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1993, 1999, Maclean and Mohr, 1999) and lesson study (Lewis and Hurd, 2011). Exploring the different terms used to define TR, nevertheless, is beyond the scope of this study. Much the same is true of exploring the various types and genres of TR. However, before I propose a working definition for TR in this study, three points need to be highlighted. First, regardless of the terms or labels used to describe it, TR is done *by* teachers rather than *on* them (by outside researchers), though it could be in collaboration with others (academics or colleagues). The agent or doer in TR is what defines it; it is teachers investigating their own practice (or their colleagues') in order to solve problems, improve practice or perhaps for a theoretical motive. Second, the activity itself is, or qualifies to be, research; one that is intentional and purposeful and not just another type of reflective or thoughtful teaching (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1999). This is a contested notion as there is no and perhaps there will never be, general agreement as to what or who decides what research really is. However, some general suggested borders to distinguish the TR territory have been drawn in the literature and will be highlighted in the definition below. Also, TR should not be divorced from reflective practice; actually reflection on practice could be the catalyst of a TR project. In this way, TR is conceptualised as a tool that enriches and supports teachers' 'active reflection' (Pring, 2004:134) and as a 'viable means of fostering the reflection necessary for successfully implementing change' (Pike, 2002:40). Finally, TR here generally refers to activities teachers are involved in intentionally and purposefully and not one-off pursuits such as the research teachers conduct for the purpose of completing a programme such as Master's or other formal qualifications such as DELTA or CELTA. For the purpose of this study, I am following Borg's definition of TR as:

systematic inquiry, qualitative and/or quantitative, conducted by teachers in their own professional contexts, individually or collaboratively (with other teachers, and/or external collaborators), which aims to enhance teachers' understandings of some aspect of their work, is made public, has the potential to contribute to better quality teaching and learning in individual classrooms and which may also inform institutional improvement, and educational policy more broadly. (Borg, 2010:395)

2.3.2 Potentials of Teacher Research

The resurgent interest in TR in the last two decades in the 20th century until recent times is due to multiple factors. First, the traditional academic research conducted by university-

based outside researchers on teaching and learning has not been favoured by teachers as it is usually too theoretical for teachers' practical work and concerns and it is usually mainly addressed to the academic community, not teachers (Beasley and Riordan, 1981, McDonough and McDonough, 1990). The result is a dissatisfaction with academic research and its relevance for the practical issues that usually face teachers: 'there are often serious difficulties in translating the knowledge generated by research into practice, at a later stage' (Somekh, 1993:31). Furthermore, teachers regard theory associated with academic research as too abstract 'having little to do with their everyday practical concerns' (Carr and Kemmis, 1985:8). Another factor behind the move towards TR could be traced to calls for teachers to heighten their sense of professionalism (Stenhouse, 1975, Brindley, 1990, Richards, 1991, Wallace, 1991, Edwards, 2005, Wyatt, 2011). Teachers, in this way, are seen as active reflective practitioners (Schön, 1983, Burns, 2011) capable of taking informed decisions about their practice.

Classrooms are complex environments (Pring, 2004, Wright, 2006) thereby adopting a research approach to teaching 'as an epistemological stance, or a way of knowing about teaching, learning and schooling' (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 2009b:44) is thought to inform our understanding of these environments. Reaching informed decisions regarding pedagogical issues entails adopting an inquiry-based reflective approach (Holliday, 1994). Another argument in favour of TR is related to teachers' closeness to (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 2009b:39), if not immersion in, the context of their teaching which allows them to provide a unique emic perspective- as opposed to an outsider, 'traditional academic' etic perspective (1990, 1999, Barcelos and Kalaja, 2011)- for the purposes of solving problems, improve practice, and grow professionally (though see Hammersley (1993) for a counter argument). This gives teachers an advantage of knowing- more than anyone else-more about and learning from the context to be investigated (Burton and Mikan, 1993, Johnson and Golombek, 2003, Rose, 2007). However, this is not to dismiss the etic perspective as irrelevant for teachers. On the contrary, working in partnership between teachers and academics and critically combining both emic and etic perspectives could be useful to all parties involved and the outcome of the inquiry could be stronger and more critical (though this is beyond the scope of the current study). Adopting a research approach to teaching would necessitate that teachers' own work and reflection feed into their practices as contrasted with the approach that comes from outside and is imposed on teachers in a top-down fashion such as the assessed research teachers have to do in their preparation or postgraduate programmes (Nunan, 1993). Moreover, teachers are acknowledged to be at

the heart of curriculum development (Stenhouse, 1975, Brindley, 1990) thus in this way research is conceptualised as a helping factor in the complex teaching process, not an extra activity scarcely related to what goes on in the classroom (Larsen-Freeman, 1991).

Beside these advantages of being involved in TR, this particular activity may prove developmental at the institutional level as well. In a profession characterised by isolation and loneliness (Freeman, 1998), TR positively contributes to an institutional professional dialogue which could transcend into cross-institutional conversations once a research culture is instilled. Wood (2007:284) maintains that 'over time, schools become places not only for learning, but also for deliberate construction and dissemination of knowledge borne of research'. In this way, TR helps in building learning communities or communities of practice characterised by valuing inquiry as a way of understanding and learning about teaching and learning processes (Wenger, 1998).

Despite the above arguments put forward in the literature, TR is challenging (Allwright, 1997) and still a 'minority activity' (Borg, 2010:391). Hancock (1997) succinctly identifies some reasons behind this lack of engagement among which are the 'lack of expectations', 'demanding nature of teaching' and 'lack of professional confidence' (1997:93). Hancock's reasons are general in nature and probably applicable to many contexts; however, each context still has its own unique environment which facilitates or deters TR. It is one of the aims of this study to unravel the contextual factors behind (lack of) research engagement.

A final point to be remembered in the discussion of TR is the power relationships. Although TR is advocated as an empowering activity for teachers (Carr and Kemmis, 1986, Schwarzer et al., 2006), it need not be imposed on them in a top-down fashion coming from academics or administrations. Academics and teachers approach research differently due to their orientations and objectives which creates different 'Discourses' between researchers and practitioners (Bartels, 2003). Imposing the academic research Discourse on teachers is an act of 'colonisation' (Bartels, 2003:750), or, put differently, 'researcher imperialism: the inappropriate imposition of research considerations on the practice of teaching' (Hammersley, 1993:224). This is also evident in the fact that the majority of journal articles discussing TR are written by university-based academics and it is usually academics who are the gatekeepers of 'prestigious' publications. For example, more than 30 out of the 44 authors of the 2011 articles which appeared in *ELT Journal*, which is 'for all those involved in the field of teaching English as a second or foreign

language' (journal website accessed: 7th December 2011), are university-based academics (see also Whitney et al., 2012 for a discussion of power and authority in teacher publication and readership). Also, as Hammersley argues, insisting on professionalising teachers through research is, in one way or another, an 'acknowledgment of the low status of teaching' (1993:224) compared with research. In this study, thus, TR is conceptualised as an empowering activity conducted by practitioners for genuine needs of which is the production, growth and scrutiny of professional knowledge (Pring, 2004:140), and impacting genuinely and positively on teachers', learners' and the whole educational context. In other words, research is not done for research sake; rather it is conceived as an activity that would create and sustain professional learning communities (Pring, 2004) that produce knowledge 'which is always tentative and open to debate' (Hammersley, 1993:213).

2.4 Beliefs about Teacher Research

2.4.1 Investigating Beliefs about Teacher Research

To date, there have been a few studies aimed at investigating beliefs about TR in primary, secondary and university settings (Borg, 2008, 2009a, Bai and Millwater, 2011, Moore, 2011, Wyatt, 2011, Borg and Alshumaimeri, 2012, Gao and Chow, 2012). The majority of these studies identified gaps between the teacher research literature which encourages teachers to engage in research and the actual lack of engagement (Borg, 2010, Wyatt, 2011). The current study aims to explore teachers' beliefs about TR in a new context- namely higher education in Syria- and the insights gained from the new context itself will probably contribute to our understanding of teachers' research engagement. Another contribution is, and unlike the previous studies, this current study is going to be the basis for a future longitudinal study (see chapter 3) in which the focus will be on how beliefs are formed, influenced, challenged and perhaps altered.

2.4.2 Potentials of Studying Beliefs about Teacher Research and Research Questions

This study is underpinned by my own belief in the potential of TR as a professional development activity for teachers that has a possibility for wider institutional impact. Researching beliefs about TR is expected to uncover patterns of adaptations and ways of thinking that teachers follow when they go about their work. Understanding teachers' existing beliefs about research and probably how they are formed may also provide

insights about planning teacher development programmes. Moreover, focusing on teachers' beliefs about different aspects of learning and teaching could result in a better understanding of teachers' thinking and decision-making processes.

Consequently, this study will aim to address the following research questions about Syrian English teachers in higher education:

1. What are teachers' beliefs about research?
2. To what extent are the teachers engaged *in* (i.e. doing), and *with* (i.e. reading) research?
3. What are the reasons behind research engagement or otherwise by teachers?
4. To what extent does the institutional culture facilitate or deter research?
5. How much does research engagement impact on practice?

2.5 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have discussed the two central themes in this study: beliefs and TR. Both terms have been interpreted in various ways in the literature signifying the slippery nature of the terms. Belief, as a concept, is more problematic as it is more abstract, open to more interpretations, and difficult to pinpoint. A traditional comparison with knowledge has been the way to define beliefs. TR has been advocated in the literature as an enriching developmental activity for teachers. However, there is an apparent lack of response from teachers to take up the role of investigating their practice. In the light of this discussion, the current study aims to investigate a group of English language teachers' beliefs about research in higher education contexts in Syria and the factors behind (the lack of) research engagement. The research questions in this study revolve around perceptions and conceptualisations of research engagement. The next chapter discusses the methodology and ethical considerations pertinent to this study.

Chapter 3: Methods of Data Collection

3.1 Research Methodology

Before discussing the methodology that guided the design of this study, I will briefly discuss the study's wider framework and the stages it went through until it reached maturity. In the original plan for this study, I intended to be in the field working closely with my participants. This study which spans the MRes research component is also supposed to be the introduction or pilot for later PhD research. However, due to the deteriorating political situation in Syria, I had to radically rethink my original plan and the research tools to conduct the study by distance. This initially posed a dilemma for me as I had conceived of being immersed in the field (Taylor and Smith, 2008:10) as an essential part of my study. Ultimately, I decided to think of this research as one preparing for the next PhD research. Consequently, I aimed to adopt an already existing research design which I will discuss below. In this way, my study conforms to the methodological assumptions of teacher cognition research, which is necessary to achieve unity of purpose and coherence in the field (Borg, 2006).

Underpinning the research design in this study is a social-constructivist view of the world (Holstein and Gubrium, 2008) which acknowledges 'the interdependence of the personal and social dimensions of teacher development' (Roberts, 1999:44). According to this view, 'the focus here is on the collective generation of meaning as shaped by conventions of language and other social processes', (Schwandt, 1998:240). As such, the study acknowledges the impracticality of trying to discover an objective reality 'out there'. Beliefs, first and foremost, are subjective in nature and significant to the individuals holding them. Therefore, any attempt to bring those beliefs to the surface and examine them, for me, should admit that they are inextricably subjective constructs shaped by one's own history and experiences. It is the participants' ways of making sense of the world and their own constructed reality -rather than an 'objective reality'- that is of great interest in this study. There is no guarantee that the professed beliefs are true; however, as the investigator in this study, I made every effort possible to eliminate any source of unreliability and get as comprehensive as possible accounts from the participants as I will discuss below. Consequently, data in this study have been collected by means of three main sources: questionnaire, interviews and written follow-up.

3.2 Questionnaire

The questionnaire in this study (see appendix 1) is adapted from Borg's (2009a) study on teachers' beliefs about research engagement. The Borg questionnaire was used as a basis for this study and then it was extensively reviewed and adapted to suit the context of my study (cf. Borg's, 2009a). For example, most of the 'research scenarios' were changed so that they would be more familiar to the participants. The questionnaire was sent to participants on 6th February 2012 and closed on 9th March 2012 with a reminder sent on 20th February 2012. It consists of six main sections all aiming to capture participants' engagement/lack of engagement in TR and their beliefs and conceptions about this activity. Section 1 invites participants to rate the importance of some research characteristics and gives them the chance to elaborate more in writing. Section two, the bulk of the questionnaire, poses 10 scenarios, or examples of research, which participants are asked to evaluate as to how much they believe these scenarios are examples of research. The scenarios provide a wide range of activities that are contextualised and relevant to the participants in the sense they have heard about or actually engaged in themselves. Besides being interested in what each participant thinks about each scenario, an additional goal of the research was to obtain qualitative data about what they thought of the scenarios in order to fully explore and understand their beliefs about each scenario. This proved to be a useful source of data as I will discuss in chapter 4. The other sections focused on participants' perceptions of the role of their institutions in encouraging or impeding TR and their research engagement. The questionnaire was piloted with a similar sample to the target participants, i.e. 4 teachers all from language education background and with teaching experience. Some amendments were made afterwards (see chapter 4 for more information about the participants).

In this particular study and contrary to Robson's (2002:245) observation that only novice researchers tend to use open-ended questions in questionnaires, I would argue there is an indisputable need for qualitative data due to the nature of the study. Also, contrary to some of the disadvantages of questionnaires put forth by Bryman (2012:234-235), the questionnaire in this study overcame some of these disadvantages. For example, as the questionnaire was administered electronically, it was not possible for participants to 'view the questionnaire as a whole' beforehand (2012:234) which might have affected their responses. Furthermore, the design of this questionnaire allowed the collection of additional qualitative data which form an integral part of this study. In terms of qualitative

data, the design of the questionnaire provided a space for participants to indicate whether or not they would like to be contacted for further follow-up. A limitation of questionnaire research is the possible superficiality of participant engagement (Dorneyi, 2002, 2007). The questionnaire in this study proved efficient in collecting data relatively quickly, economically and, in this context, safely. As for the level of engagement, it cannot be guaranteed that all participants will have the same level of engagement; yet, there was a response rate of nearly 55% and a considerable volume of qualitative data was collected.

3.3 Interviews

After looking at the questionnaire data, 4 participants (see table 1 below) were chosen for follow-up interviews. Initially, 5 participants were chosen but one of them did not reply to the invitation to take part in an interview. Interviews were conducted between 7th and 9th April 2012. Interviewees are listed according to their interview date

Name	Age	Qualification	Teaching experience (in years)	Gender
Teacher 7	32	Master's	8	F
Teacher 5	Early 30s	Master's	7	F
Teacher 6	Mid 20s	Master student	1.5	F
Teacher 13	29	Master student	6	M

Table 3.1: Interviewees

The criteria for sampling interviewees was determined by those participants who reported strong views regarding TR on either side of the continuum, i.e. strongly believe in TR or strongly do not. In this way, I aimed at understanding different views and beliefs my participants hold. My aim was to use teachers' individual questionnaire as prompts for the interviews. Luckily, the sample reflected the age, gender and qualification diversity of the larger pool.

Telephone interviews were used in this study and each interview lasted between 50-60 minutes. Telephone interviews, as opposed to in-person interviews, are effective in many respects. These include reduced interviewer effect, standardisation in delivery and most significantly safety (Shuy, 2003). On the other hand, there are drawbacks of telephone interviews from my experience in this study. The quality of the recorded interviews is inferior to the face-to-face ones (Bryman, 2012:215) and so is participants' engagement generally speaking. One of the interviews I did was very difficult to transcribe, and therefore, I had to depend on my notes during the interview. Another drawback includes

the inability to 'engage in observation' (Bryman, 2012) meaning that I could not read their non-verbal expressions (puzzlement, confusion or surprise) which could have enabled me to ask the question in a different way or ask additional follow-up questions. The telephone interviews proved to be effective particularly in this context where face-to-face would have been difficult to do.

Interviews focused on the participants' answers to the questionnaire and I aimed to understand the reasons behind their answers. For example, I asked all the interviewees about their reasons for choosing a particular scenario to be research/not research. Although I had a set of questions pre-prepared for each interviewee depending on their responses to the questionnaire, I was open to follow-up any new idea during the interview. Interviews were recorded and transcribed afterwards.

3.4 Written Follow-up

One last source of qualitative data for this project is written follow-up. Thus, four participants were identified to have some outstanding and intriguing responses to the questionnaires. In this method, participants were invited to retrospectively reflect on their answers to the earlier questionnaire (Borg, 2006, 2009a). These participants were contacted via email to provide more details about their answers. This method is similar to email interview though the term 'written follow-up' is the one used in research reports. The main difference from interviews is that the participants here were targeted for very specific questions for clarification and elaboration.

3.5 Data analysis

The main source of data for this study is the quantitative questionnaire therefore descriptive statistics was used for analysis. More importantly, thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) was also used across all data sets: questionnaire, interviews and written follow-up to identify themes that correspond to the original questionnaire themes. This means the themes from the questionnaire backed up with corresponding themes from the qualitative data were identified and triangulated across all data to produce robust categories relevant to the research questions (see chapters 4 and 5). Analysis depended on examining both descriptive statistics to see any tendency and then and looking at the corresponding narrative from the qualitative data. In this way, I was better able to understand and hypothesise about certain issues or tendencies I uncovered.

3.6 Ethical considerations

Before commencing this study, an initial ethical clearance was obtained on 9th January 2012 from the OU Ethical Committee to start the data collection process and the final version was obtained on 1st May 2012 (see appendix 2). Moreover, ethical clearance was also obtained from the Syrian Ministry of Higher Education to conduct the study there. Throughout the data collection, the BERA Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (British Educational Research, 2011) as well as the Open University Code of Practice were followed explicitly. Each participant received an invitation email including an informed consent form (see appendix 3) to keep for reference and sign electronically prior to taking part in the study. Anonymity and destruction of personal data were assured for all participants. Also, participants knew they could withdraw from the study at anytime, and their participation or withdrawal would never be reported to a third party (i.e. their employers). This proved effective in the sense that participants were in general engaged in critiquing their research culture (see chapter 5). One ethical issue surfaced at the time of the interviews, though. Here, one participant was a bit reluctant at the beginning as it is widely known in Syria that telephone calls are monitored especially at times of political upheaval. The only way round this issue was for me to build rapport with the interviewees and assure them that I was only interested in their beliefs about research and nothing to do with politics in the interview. The first few minutes of a telephone interview are usually stressful but it becomes more relaxed as the interview proceeds, as far as I experienced it.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis, Discussion and Initial Findings

4.1 Participants

As outlined in chapter 1 and detailed in figure 4.1 below, 52 out of 95 teachers completed the questionnaire, the response rate is 54.17%. Overall the response rate was higher than the minimum limit indicated in the survey literature being 40 participants (Sapsford, 2007:92).

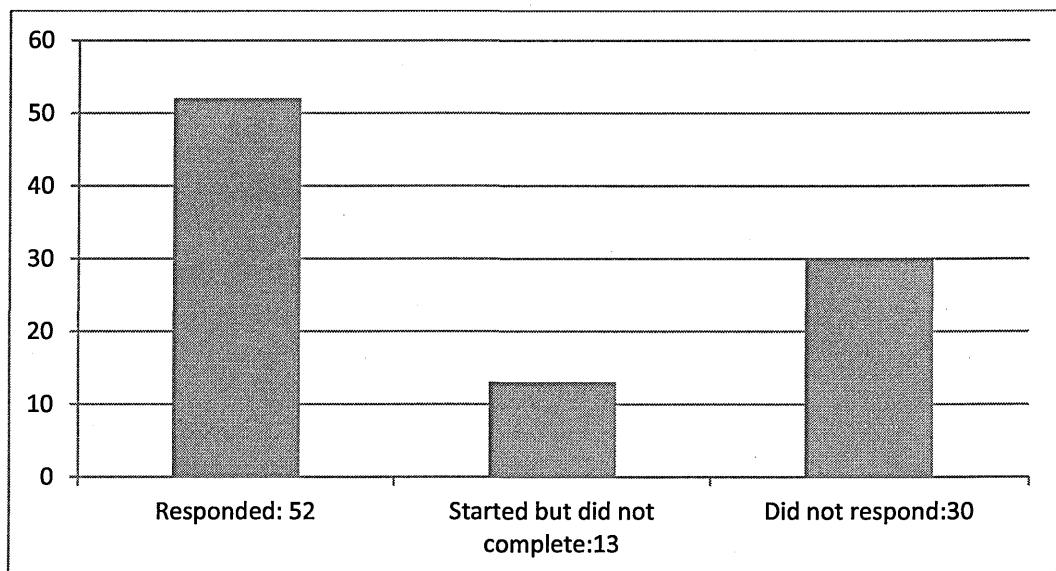


Figure 4.1: Response rate

Table 4.1 below reflects the participants' range of teaching experiences with the majority being distributed equally between the 0-4 and 5-9 groups. Table 4.2 shows participants' relevant teaching qualifications with a majority (N=35) having master degrees in applied linguistics, teaching English or education in general (each respondent here indicated all his/her obtained qualifications at the time of this study hence the sum of the qualifications is greater than the number of participants). The fact that the majority of the participants have taken a postgraduate course/qualification -usually research or with a research component- has significant implications on this study as will be detailed in chapter 5.

Year	N	%
0 – 4	19	36.5 %
5 – 9	19	36.5 %
10 – 14	7	13.5 %
15 – 19	6	11.5 %
20 – 24	0	0.0 %
25+	1	1.9 %

Table 4.1: Respondents by years of teaching experience

Qualification	N	%
Master's	35	67.3 %
Bachelor's	22	42.3 %
Certificate	9	17.3 %
Diploma	6	11.5 %

Table 4.2: Respondents by teaching qualification

Figure 4.2 shows the percentage of male and female participants in this sample with an overwhelming majority being female teachers. Figure 4.3 shows the age range of participants with 20-29 being the most common age among the participants.

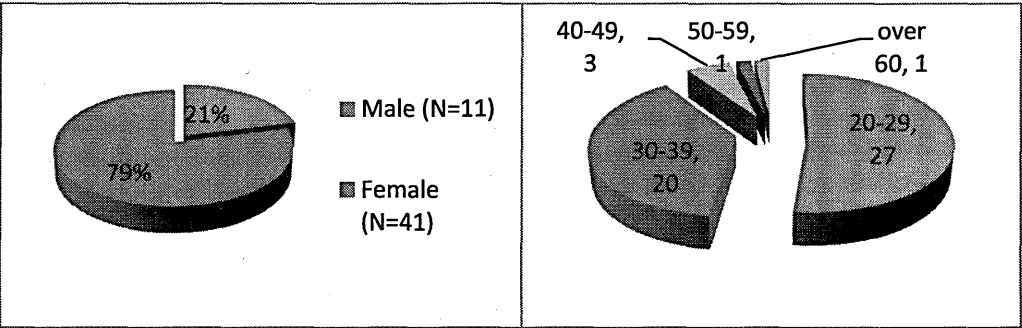


Figure 4.2: participants by gender

Figure 4.3: participants by age

Responses to the questionnaire also showed that (i) about 60% of the participants (N=31) work in the public sector, (ii) about 71% of them (N=37) work full-time and (iii) about 81% (N=42) of them indicated willingness to participate in follow-up research.

4.2 Beliefs about Research

As discussed in chapter 3, the questionnaire aimed at exploring respondents' beliefs and conceptions about research through two main ways: the characteristics of research and scenario evaluation.

4.2.1 Research characteristics

Section 1 of the questionnaire was designed to uncover respondents' views about various research characteristics. In order to encourage participants to give their immediate views, it was highlighted at the beginning of the questionnaire that 'there are no right or wrong answers' and I added 'please give your quick first impression here' to the instruction of this first section. Table 4.3 below shows participants' responses to the ten research characteristics. For the purpose of this study, the responses were collapsed into three main

options: ‘unimportant’, ‘unsure’ and ‘important’. These characteristics are listed here in a descending order depending on the percentage of respondents who indicated a certain characteristic was ‘important’. As is evident in this table, objectivity and practicality of research were highly rated as important for a research project. Hypotheses testing and using experiments were also regarded as important for research as 84.6% and 80.8% of the respondents respectively rated them as important.

	Unimportant		Unsure		Important	
	(%)	N	(%)	N	(%)	N
The researcher is objective	9.6	5	0		90.4	47
The results give teachers ideas they can use	7.7	9	5.8	8	86.5	35
Hypotheses are tested	11.6	6	3.8	2	84.6	44
Experiments are used	11.5	6	7.7	4	80.8	42
Information analysed statistically	19.2	10	5.8	3	75	39
A large volume of information is collected	23.1	12	5.8	3	71.1	37
A large number of people are studied	19.2	10	11.5	6	69.3	36
The results made public	17.3	9	15.4	8	67.3	35
Questionnaires are used	20.8	16	13.5	7	55.8	29
The results apply to many contexts	25	13	21.2	11	53.8	28

Table 4.3: Teachers’ views on the importance of some research characteristics

In the interview and written follow-up I sought to tease out beliefs about some of these characteristics in more detail. Below is a synthesis of participants’ explanations and rationales for some of these characteristics *in their own words*. The characteristics collated below are not chosen on the basis of their importance as indicated in table 4.3 above. Rather, I present here characteristics where (i) a minimum of three participants engaged in explaining or providing rationales for their choices, and (ii) their input is more than ‘I think it is important/unimportant’. Therefore, not all the characteristics will be discussed below; however, those discussed could be considered as the relevant ones depending on respondents’ beliefs about research as they resonated with them as important/unimportant and the participants had something to say about these characteristics. Table 4.4 below provides a summary of the participants’ -both in the written follow-up and the interviews- beliefs and conceptions about *objectivity* as a characteristic of research, which is also top-rated.

Participant	Type of data	Teacher's input
Teacher 1	Written follow-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The researcher should address real world problems, and he/she shouldn't be shy of their weak points or try to hide them from other teachers.
Teacher 2	Written follow-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The researcher should do his/her best to be neutral throughout the whole research, and be open to any surprises they get while gathering data. • Some researchers have a conclusion in mind, and try to shape the findings in a way that suits them best. • The researcher should not be influenced by a narrow scope of the literature they know.
Teacher 3	Written follow-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A subjective researcher will just choose the results that suit his/her point of view. • He/she should be open to the possibility that the result of his/her research could be contradictory to what he/she has in mind in the hypothesis.
Teacher 4	Written follow-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detached, and rational. • Objectivity cannot be achieved fully in any research.
Teacher 5	Interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not forcing your opinion on the research. • Not leading the participants to give a specific answer the researcher wants.
Teacher 6	Interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trying not to force his/her perspective upon the research. • The researcher must mention all the advantages, and disadvantages. • But teachers cannot be objective because they are involved in the issues they research.
Teacher 7	Interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objectivity in teacher research cannot be achieved because teachers are already involved in the problems they investigate.

Table 4.4: Objectivity

Table 4.5 below provides a synthesis of some of the participants' views and beliefs about 'the research gives teachers ideas they can use' or *practicality*.

Participant	Type of data	Teacher's input
Teacher 2	Written follow-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other than using ideas in the classroom, a teacher/researcher is always updated with the problem in their context and the suitable solution for them. • They are actively involved in teaching which makes teaching more interesting, and effective. • I think research can be seen as teacher continuous development, and it can be more effective than attending workshops or doing courses.
Teacher 4	Written follow-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Even if the results of research do not apply to all contexts, they still include ideas that can be beneficial with some modifications made maybe.
Teacher 7	Interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classes, in general, are different but ideas about teaching can be adapted to suit the different classes. This makes exchanging ideas among teachers both important, and enriching.

Table 4.5: Practicality

Table 4.6 below provides a synthesis of participants' beliefs and conceptions about the importance of sample size where 69.3% indicated 'a large number of people are studied' is important.

Participant	Type of data	Teacher's input
Teacher 1	Written follow-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students usually have different levels, abilities, and interests, so it's better to include a larger number in order to get more reliable results.
Teacher 2	Written follow-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It depends on the kind of research that is being done; quantitative or qualitative. In our university, however, there is a feeling that we have students with very similar backgrounds, experiences, needs, and, even ambitions. The lack of variety in experiences makes our students the same in one way or another. In my opinion, a small number of students, carefully chosen, can represent the others.
Teacher 3	Written follow-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A large sample indicates that we are considering all the possible kinds of people we need to consider.
Teacher 5	Interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Large number of people gives more valid data. A small number of students won't give you a clear idea about your topic or what the teacher is investigating.
Teacher 6	Interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If the data is collected from a small number of participants and the results are feasible maybe they can be applied to other groups.
Teacher 7	Interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Because when you do research, the target is the learner. Each learner has his/her own ways of learning. It is very important to cover as much as possible of the varieties of the students we have by studying a large number of people.

Table 4.6: Sample Size

Another research characteristic I will highlight here is the use of questionnaires as a research method. 55.8% of the respondents rated this as important, though with a relatively low percentage compared with other characteristics. Table 4.7 below shows some views about the use of questionnaires.

Participant	Type of data	Teacher's input
Teacher 2	Written follow-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A direct and easy way for any researcher to get accurate data about a problem they are researching. It also can suggest some new ideas to the researchers, and be a good start for in-depth study of the problem by using other research tools.
Teacher 3	Written follow-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I think this is one of the most common research methods; it gives the researcher the chance to test his/her hypothesis on a large scale.
Teacher 4	Written follow-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I think it is unimportant. There are other tools that can be used. Interviews, observations, recordings, etc. might even render better results because they are more reliable.
Teacher 5	Interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Questionnaires are important because you can collect a large number of reliable data easily, and quickly. This is also related to the sample size. I believe that a large number of people should be studied, and questionnaire is a good method to use with large number of people.
Teacher 7	Interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Questionnaires are important because you are not under pressure when you have the questionnaire especially if you don't have much. A respondent is not under pressure.

Table 4.7: Questionnaires

The final research characteristic to be presented here is making research public through conferences, journal articles, workshops or any other means available for teachers. As shown in table 4.3, 67.3% of the respondents indicated that this is an ‘important’ research characteristic. Table 4.8 below is a summary of respondents’ views and beliefs about making research public.

Participant	Type of data	Teacher’s input
Teacher 3	Written follow-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It’s important that the research is studied, and recognized later in all the possible contexts ... so it will be more valuable
Teacher 5	Interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think the first step is to make it public within your context for your colleagues to know what you have done. • What’s the point if you do research, and you’ve come up with many interesting results, and at the end you didn’t make it public? • It is very important to let other people [...] benefit from your results
Teacher 6	Interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student teachers should be provided with a way to publish their work. • I mean when I make my research available to others and others take it, and read it, maybe do something similar or just critique it or recommend something about it. That is how I understand research.

Table 4.8: Going Public

4.2.2 Scenario Evaluation

Figure 4.4 below shows the percentages of respondents who evaluated each scenario as ‘research’ or ‘not research’. I will use ‘research’/‘not research’ with inverted commas here to signal that this is what respondents think research is/is not and also to differentiate it from the definition I proposed in chapter 2. For the purpose of this study, ‘definitely research’ and ‘probably research’ were collapsed into ‘research’ (or simply good research) whereas ‘definitely not research’ and ‘probably not research’ were collapsed into ‘not research’ (or simply ‘not good research’) for ease and clarity of reporting. As shown in the figure, a sizeable percentage of respondents believed that scenarios 2,4,5,6, and 8 were ‘research’. However, there were not big differences in percentages of respondents in scenario 1, 3, 9, and 10. Scenario 7 (see below) is the only one where the majority of respondents chose it to be ‘not research’. The scenarios produced voluminous data: from direct comments on the questionnaire itself, from the written follow-up and data from interviews. I will illustrate the main points from each scenario here whereas appendix 4 includes tables that correspond with the numbers of the scenarios in which I collated relevant raw data about each scenario for reference. The scenarios themselves are included in the grey boxes below for ease of reference.

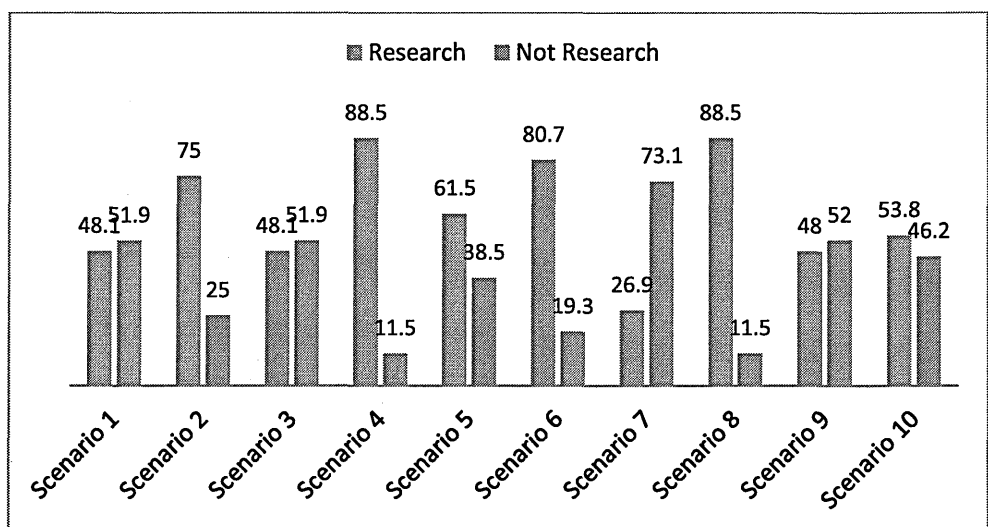


Figure 4.4: Scenario evaluation

• **Scenario 1:**

1. A group of teachers decided that they wanted to change the English course books they were using. They reported their concerns to the head of the department who divided them into small groups and assigned roles to assess the weak points of the old book and write up a report. A series of workshops was set up to discuss the reports and the final decision was to change the course books.

Only 48.1 % of the respondents (N=25) thought this scenario is an example of ‘research’. Among the reasons they provided are that the work was organised, there was a problem which teachers sought to solve and there was collaborative work among the teachers to improve their work. A respondent, Teacher 8, even introduced the term ‘informal research’ to describe this scenario and perhaps differentiate it from other prevalent types of research in applied linguistics and education she is familiar with. Teacher 6 thought this was an example of action research maintaining that it is done by teachers for the aim of their development, and the workshop functioned as a means of going public. On the other hand, 51.9 % of the respondents (N=27) thought this scenario was not ‘research’. Among the reasons behind this choice were: there was no clear data collection or methodology in this scenario, learners were not involved in the process, i.e. their input and feedback about the old course book and that it was subjective.

• **Scenario 2:**

2. A teacher read about a new approach to teaching writing and decided to try it out in his class over a period of two weeks. He video recorded some of his lessons and collected samples of learners’ written work. He analyzed this information then presented the results to his colleagues at a staff meeting.

75% of the respondents (N=39) thought that this was ‘research’. A recurrent rationale for this choice was that it represented to many teachers an example of action research (see table 2, appendix 4). Also, it was stressed that there was a clear process of intentional recording, and analysis of the data. Moreover, Teacher 2 argues that ‘this is how I understand research: trying to develop and keep up to date with the latest developments. Also, see how you can adapt them in your context and share the findings with other professionals, so this example is an excellent one of research’. The respondents who decided it was ‘not research’ (N=13) highlighted sample size and time in their rationales (see table 2, appendix 4).

- **Scenario 3:**

3. A teacher was doing an MA course. She read several books and articles about grammar teaching then wrote an essay of 6000 words in which she discussed the main points in the readings and how it related to her English teaching.

Like scenario 1, scenario 3 received the same percentages of respondents thinking it was ‘research’/not research. However, and as table 3 appendix 4 shows, there were only two comments on why it is ‘research’; the majority of the comments, and input focused on why it is ‘not research’. The ‘pro’ respondents thought of this scenario as a component of research, or an introduction to a research project i.e. reviewing the literature, and critiquing it. On the other hand, the ‘con’ respondents highlighted that there was no practical implication or change occurred as a result of this scenario as well as there were no data collected or analysis. Also, it was suggested that this was a type of reflective practice, not research (see table 2, appendix 4). Finally, Teacher 11 maintains that she ‘can’t see the research hunch or research tools’ in this scenario.

- **Scenario 4:**

4. A teacher gave a questionnaire about teaching grammar to all the teachers in the English department. She then did some individual and group interviews. Statistics were used to analyze the questionnaires. The teacher wrote an article about the work in an academic journal.

88.5% of the respondents (46) thought this was an example of research. Unlike the previous scenario, teachers here seem to focus on defending why they thought it was ‘research’. Data collection and analysis were highlighted as significant factors that made it ‘research’. As Teacher 11 succinctly puts it ‘this is what research is all about: collecting some data, analysing them, and coming up with a certain conclusion’.

- **Scenario 5:**

5. Two teachers were both interested in improving classroom management and discipline. They observed each other's lessons once a week for three months and made notes about how they controlled their classes. They discussed their notes and wrote a short article about what they learned for the newsletter of the National Language Teachers' Association.

In this scenario, 61.5 % of the respondents (N=33) thought it was 'research'. The notion of 'informal research' was repeated here to describe this scenario. More importantly, and as in the previous scenarios, some respondents stated that as long as it is an attempt to solve teaching problems in a systematic and organised way, then it is 'research'.

- **Scenario 6:**

6. To find out which of two methods for teaching vocabulary was more effective, a teacher first tested two classes to assess their vocabulary. Then for four weeks she taught vocabulary to each class using a different method. After that she tested both groups again and compared the results to the first test. She decided to use the method which worked best to improve students' vocabulary in her own teaching.

This scenario, like scenario 4, received a considerably high percentage of respondents who thought it was 'research', 80.7 % (N=42). Here respondents emphasised that testing a new approach or hypothesis is an effective way of doing research. Also it was suggested that this could be an effective way of teaching as well: 'it is a new way of teaching through which you can find out the weak points in your students and improve them. In this way you can make your class an ideal one' (Teacher 19). Respondents who thought this was 'not research' highlighted issues related to sample size and the inability to generalise this experience (see table 6, appendix 4)

- **Scenario 7:**

7. Mid-way through a course, a teacher gave a class of 30 students a feedback form. The next day, 9 students handed in their completed forms. The teacher read these and used the information to decide what to do in the second part of the course.

This is the only scenario which the majority of respondents (73.1 %, N=38) thought it was 'not research'. As it is clear in table 7 in appendix 4, most respondents commented on why it was 'not research' even those who opted for 'research' stated that they did so assuming that this scenario represented a stage in the research process. 'Reflective teaching', 'feedback, not research' and 'needs analysis' are what some respondents thought this

scenario represented for them. Teacher 5, reflecting on this scenario, contends that ‘this is a kind of feedback that almost all teachers do continuously in their classes’.

- **Scenario 8:**

8. A teacher noticed that her students’ writing was almost a translation from Arabic. She read about the issue and found some practical ideas. She adopted the ideas in her own class while making notes and keeping copies of the writings. Afterwards, she reflected on the notes and writings and found considerable change in students’ written production. She decided to present her experience in a conference.

Like scenario 4, 88.5% of the respondents (N=46) thought this was an example of ‘research’. Action research is a recurrent rationale for deciding that this scenario was ‘research’. Finding a problem and attempting to solve it systematically is another reason which is also recurrent in other scenario as indicated above. There was only one comment made in relation to why this scenario was ‘not research’ being the sample size is not enough.

- **Scenario 9:**

9. A concern of some English language teachers is how to mark written work consistently. For this purpose, they spent 3 months attending workshops to discuss different ways of marking students’ writing. Then they worked in small groups to develop consistent criteria for marking writing that they thought would improve their practice and they presented their results to other colleagues.

Only 48% (N=25) of the respondents thought this was an example of ‘research’. Teacher 2 thinks that this is ‘not research’ because it ‘is just floating, recycling their own ideas’ and Teacher 11 also agrees that this is ‘not research’ because it ‘is a way to develop homogeneity in the marking criteria. However, those teachers did not come up with anything new’. Others saw it as discussion, and sharing experiences where no data were collected.

- **Scenario 10:**

10. A teacher interviewed a student once a week for a whole semester in order to understand the learning strategies this student was using to improve her English. The teacher analyzed the interviews and presented his findings at an education conference.

53.8% of the respondents (28) thought this was ‘research’. Interestingly, both respondents who thought this was ‘research’ and the ones who thought it was not highlighted the issue of sample size as a weakness point and makes the study difficult to generalise.

4.3 Research Culture

In this section, participants were asked to respond to 9 statements regarding the research culture in their respective universities. Table 4.9 below shows a summary of the responses. In this section, however, the option ‘I don’t know’ could be regarded as equal to ‘disagree’. For example, it can be inferred from those who indicated that they ‘do not know’ whether ‘teachers talk about research’ or ‘do research’ that it is not happening or it is not a characteristic of their work. Therefore, and for the purpose of this study, ‘disagree’ includes ‘don’t know’. Table 4.9 below shows a general tendency of disagreement by more than half of the respondents in almost all 9 cases, with the exception of number 8.

	Agree		Disagree	
	%	N	%	N
1-Teachers do research	44.2	23	55.8	29
2-Teachers feel doing research helps with their job	53.9	28	46.1	24
3-The management encourages research	40.4	21	59.6	31
4-Teachers have access to up-to-date books and journals	28.8	15	71.2	37
5-Teachers have opportunities to learn about research	46.2	24	53.8	28
6-Teachers talk about research	30.7	16	69.3	36
7-Teachers are given support to attend ELT conferences	34.6	18	65.4	34
8-Time for doing research is built into teachers' workloads	25	13	75	39
9-Teachers read published research	36.5	19	63.5	33

Table 3: Research Culture

What is worth highlighting here is the contrast between number 2 on the one hand and number 4 and 8 on the other. Number 2, remarkably, is (i) the only one where more than half of the respondents (53.9%) expressed agreement with and (ii) it is about the *feelings* towards doing research. The significance of this will be explored further in chapter 5. The other two features of research culture, 4, and 8, both more than 70 % of the respondents indicated they were not characteristics of their work which will also be discussed in chapter 5.

4.4 Reading Research

After looking at what constitutes research for the participants, section 4 of the questionnaire sought to understand teachers’ levels of engagement with research through reading. Originally in the questionnaire, respondents were given four options with varying degrees to choose from depending on how much they thought/felt they were involved in reading research. These four options are: ‘Never’, ‘Rarely’, ‘Sometimes’ and ‘Often’; for the purpose of this dissertation, the first two will be collapsed into ‘No’, and the other two into ‘Yes’. To avoid potential ambiguity in interpreting ‘sometimes’ and ‘often’ reported in

similar research (Borg, 2009a:371), respondents who indicated that they read research ‘sometimes’ or ‘often’ were asked to interpret what they exactly meant by ‘sometimes’ or ‘often’, for example 2 articles a month, a book every semester. Generally, responses to interpret ‘often’ and ‘sometimes’ ranged between 1-3 articles or reports every month. Figure 4.5 below shows the percentages of respondents who indicated they read published research being 67.3 (N=35) for this sample against 32.7 (N=17) who do not.

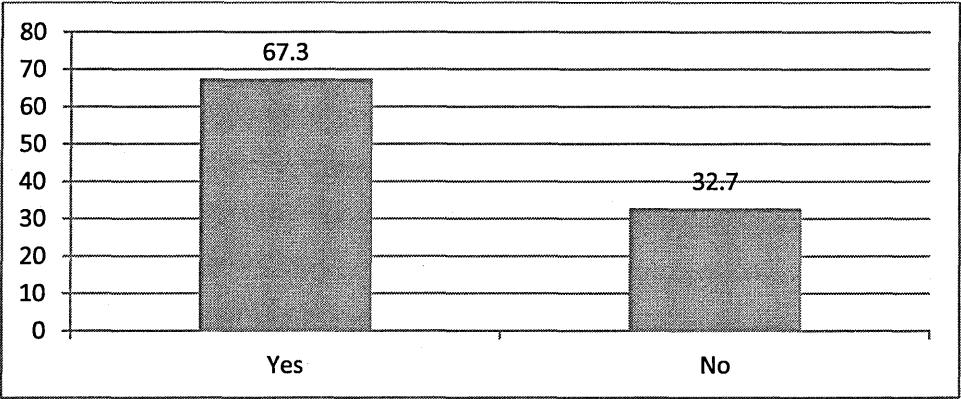


Figure 4.5: Reading research

The participants who indicated that they read research (N=35) were asked about the types of research they read. Table 4.10 below shows the resources participants use to read research with the number of participants for each one. Noticeably, web-based resources featured highly among participants.

	N	%
Web-based sources of research	26	74.3 %
Books	20	57.1 %
Newsletters (e.g. IATEFL SIG Newsletters)	17	48.6 %
Professional journals (e.g. ELT Journal)	17	48.6 %
Academic journals (e.g. TESOL Quarterly)	14	40.0 %
Professional magazines (e.g. ET Professional)	7	20.0 %

Table 4: Resources for reading research

Figure 4.6 below shows that of all the participants who indicated that they read published research (N=35), 82.9% of them (N=29) indicated that reading research has a strong influence on their practice.

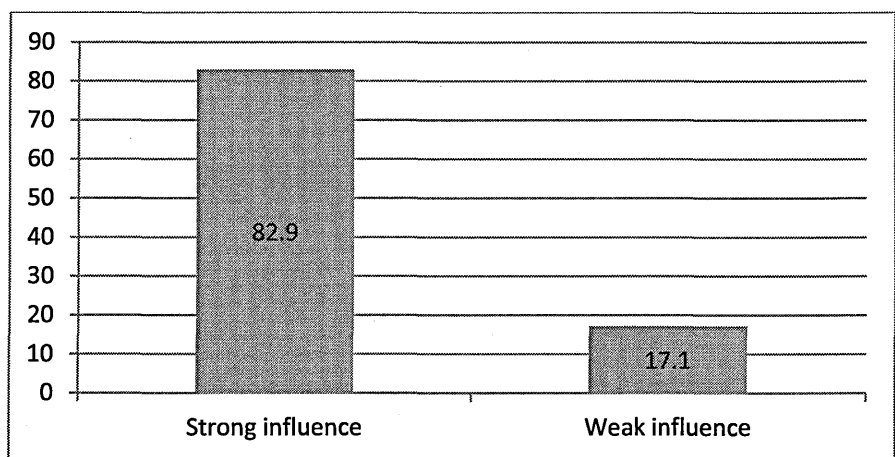


Figure 4.6: Influence of reading research on practice

Of particular significance to teachers who read published research is the search for practical ideas to be adapted in their classes- this links to the aforementioned result in table 4 that 86.5% think that research should give practical ideas. Teacher 2, for example, believes that:

Reading research always gives me food for thought and new ideas to experiment with and see if they work with my students. Even if the context is sometimes completely different, you can still benefit from the findings and see what suits you. For example, I adjusted the way I teach writing after I read and had a wide scope of ideas and experiments from others.

Also Teacher 3 notes that:

The research I have read was beneficial in terms of their practical implications. The ones that had the great influence on my teaching are about keeping discipline in the classroom, using films in class, using songs in class, motivation, teaching grammar, teaching spelling, the different learning styles, games in class, drama, and teaching, pair/group work etc. These are the ones I remember the most. I tried to test whether the results of these articles/books really apply to our classes or not.

Finally, table 4.11 below shows the reasons that participants who do not read published research (N=17) cited for not reading research. Time, unsurprisingly, came as a main reason behind not reading research along with no access to research.

	N	%
I do not have time	10	58.8 %
I do not have access to books, and journals	10	58.8 %
Published research does not give me practical advice for the classroom	6	35.3 %
I am not interested in research	4	23.5 %
I find published research hard to understand	1	5.9 %

Table 4.9: Reasons behind not reading research

4.5 Doing Research

In this section, respondents were asked to report their levels of engagement in doing research themselves. As in the previous section, the respondents were presented with the same frequency options - never, rarely, sometimes, and often - to indicate their level of engagement in doing research. Again, once a respondent chose ‘sometimes’ or ‘often’, he/she was asked to explain their responses. Table 4.12 below shows a summary of respondents’ reported levels of engagement in doing research. Interestingly, none of the participants indicated doing research ‘often’. Among the interpretations of ‘sometimes’ 19 participants reported are: ‘once a year’, ‘once or twice a year’, ‘once it is needed, no specific time’ and ‘it depends; once a year on average’ with once a year being the most recurrent (N=10).

	N	%
Never	7	13.5 %
Rarely	50	50%
Sometimes	19	36.5 %
Often	0	0.0 %
Total	52	100.0 %

Table 5: Levels of engagement in doing research

Table 4.13 below shows the reasons behind engagement in doing research. Again, the majority of respondents who do research do it for practical reasons: solving problems (N=17), professional development (N=14) and finding better ways for teaching (N=13).

	N	%
To solve problems in my teaching	17	89.5 %
Because it is good for my professional development	14	73.7 %
To find better ways of teaching	13	68.4 %
Because I enjoy it	10	52.6 %
To contribute to the improvement of the institute generally	7	36.8 %
As part of a course I am studying on	5	26.3 %
Because it will help me get a promotion	1	5.3 %
Because my employer expects me to	1	5.3 %
Because other teachers can learn from the findings of my work	1	5.3 %

Table 6: Reasons for doing research

Finally, table 4.14 below shows the reasons behind not doing research with numbers and percentages of respondents for each reason. Time is unquestionably a central reason behind not doing research especially taking into consideration these teachers’ heavy workload and the narrow discretionary margin teachers usually have to engage in research.

	N	%
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I do not have time to do research.	25	75.8 %
Most of my colleagues do not do research.	15	45.5 %
I do not have access to the books, and journals I need.	13	39.4 %
I need someone to advise me but no one is available.	11	33.3 %
I do not know enough about research methods.	8	24.2 %
My job is to teach not to do research.	6	18.2 %
I am not interested in doing research.	4	12.1 %
The learners would not co-operate if I did research in class.	4	12.1 %
Other teachers would not co-operate if I asked for their help.	3	9.1 %
My employer discourages me.	2	6.1 %

Table 7: Reasons behind not doing research

4.6 Chapter Summary

In this chapter the main goal was to present data relevant to my research questions. This has been done through presenting data mainly from the questionnaire as well as from interviews and written follow-up. I started with presenting data relevant to beliefs and conceptions about research which comprises characteristics of research, and scenario evaluation. Then I looked at research culture, reading research and doing research. Relevant data for this study were presented in this chapter or in the appendix with initial interpretation. Chapter 5 will be dedicated to interpreting the findings.

Chapter 5: Interpretation and Findings

5.1 Introduction

This chapter considers the research questions which address the data gathered from the questionnaire, interviews and written follow-up. It provides interpretations and findings regarding teachers' beliefs about research, their research engagement, the research culture and finally the extent of any impact of research on their professional practice.

5.2 Beliefs and Conceptions of Research

In this section I will discuss the main points that characterise Syrian English teachers' beliefs and conceptions about research. The data in the previous chapter, particularly section 4.2, reveal beliefs and conceptions of research which I intend to discuss below.

- *Positivism*

Overall, the teachers in this sample have beliefs about research that could be described as positivist or 'aligned with conventional scientific notions of inquiry' (Borg, 2009a:374). Positivism, in general, 'seeks to apply scientific method to new fields, including the study of human behaviour, social institutions, and history' and positivists insist that 'psychological, social, and political phenomena are governed just as much by laws as are physical objects or biological organisms' and, finally, a central feature of positivism is the reliance on explicit procedures, and methods - or 'procedural objectivity' - in order to produce sound knowledge as Hammersley explains (2009:17-18). This is evident in respondents' rating of the research characteristics (see table 4.3 above) where the majority of the respondents believe it is important to: be objective (90.4% of the respondents), test hypotheses (80.8%), use experiments (80.8%), and analyse the data statistically (75%)-positivism is predominantly associated with the use of quantitative research methods (Hammersley, 2009:18). Some respondents explained their beliefs in commenting on the scenarios (scenario 5 for example) that the use of statistics was the factor that made the scenario 'research' for them. With the majority of the participants in this study having undertaken, or were doing at the time of this study, master programmes, it could be hypothesised that the research they had to do/were doing for their degrees influenced their beliefs about research in general and that their conceptions of research were shaped by those presented in their Masters courses (though see chapter 6).

- *Sample Size*

Beliefs about research are also influenced by sample size. Having a big sample that allows the researcher to generalise was seen as essential component of a research project. In more than 17 places in the questionnaire, interviews and written follow-up comments explaining why a certain scenario was/was not 'research' were about issues related to sample size. For example, Teacher 5 argues that 'one student's learning strategy can't be generalized' because, she continues 'in a class of 15 students, for example, we have 15 learning strategies and we have to include the 15 if we want to do meaningful research'. In a similar vein, Teacher 14, criticising one of the scenarios, says that 'this student cannot represent but himself. Then the results cannot be extended to others'.

- *Practicality*

Data in this study revealed that participants' beliefs about research were influenced by the research's practicality or how it could be used to improve practice. Research in general for the participants should provide practical ideas teachers could extract and implement in their classes. Recurrent in teachers' beliefs in regards to their responses about the scenarios were solving problems in teaching practice, innovative ideas, application of the results and change/improvement of practice. Teacher 2 explains her beliefs of doing research as a situation where she aims to 'develop and keep up to date with the latest developments. Also, see how [I] can adapt them in [my] context, and share the findings with other professionals'. This tendency of teachers to be interested in practical solutions and, perhaps, usable recipes to test and try in their classes is not surprising knowing that teachers', unlike researchers, main duty is to teach which is a highly practical job in nature. The practical orientation of teachers, though understandable, formulates beliefs about what research should be and should offer. This orientation creates a gap between what is expected from research and what it actually offers. This also has implications for the genre of the research, the audience, the style and the rationale behind each choice, which is beyond the scope of this study (see chapter 6 for a discussion of the limitations). Due to teachers' practical orientations and the perceived gap between research and practice, there have been attempts to bridge this gap, and bring the two worlds closer (see for example McIntyre, 2005, Rust, 2009). Overall, teachers' beliefs about the practicality of research shapes their research engagement-i.e. why they read or do research- as Teacher 21 puts it 'by research, I mainly mean simple experiments in class, used for personal professional

development. These I often do every time I read about new ways, I try and adapt them to my context in the classes’.

- *Informal Research*

An interesting finding emerged from the data in regards to teachers’ beliefs about research. The data suggest that teachers believe in ‘personal’ or ‘informal research’, rather than formal or positivist research, as valuable research because this kind of research allows teachers to try new ideas, test them and evaluate them similarly to Teacher 2 and 21 quoted above. Teacher 6 also talked about attending workshops to get ideas to adapt in her classes. What is significant about this characteristic of research is that although it stands at odds with positivism, which is a major undertaking, teachers believe that implementing, testing and trying new innovative ideas as doing ‘informal’ research. The way this could be understood is that doing research with a positivist agenda is demanding and probably not all teachers can spare the time and effort to do it; thus, they simply see the act of doing something new and innovative in their classes, especially if it is done in an organised manner and leads to improvement in teaching and learning as ‘research’.

- *Conclusion*

Overall, Syrian teachers’ beliefs can be categorised as two, though contrasting, types of ‘research’ that were identified in the data: the conventional scientific positivist type and the informal type. The former is high stakes and appears to be a major undertaking. Interestingly, none of the participants, especially those who took part in the interview or the written follow-up, reported any on-going engagement in this type of research. The assessed research components, in Master’s programmes for example, represent an influence in shaping teachers’ beliefs and conception about research, though this is tentative (see chapter 6). The latter, informal research is one where a teacher innovates in his or her classes, tries new ideas and tests them in an organised and reflective manner. The teachers who took part in the interview and written follow-up reported engagement in this type of activity. Compared with the definition of ‘teacher research’ proposed in chapter 2, it would be difficult to describe ‘informal research’ as teacher research, though see chapter 6 for a discussion of implications and limitations.

5.3 Research Engagement

The discussion herein is focused on teachers' beliefs about research engagement in terms of reading and doing. First, there is a considerable level of engagement in reading published research (67.3% of the participants) as outlined in the previous chapter (see figure 4.5 above) is characteristic of research engagement. The most common engagement was reading research from online resources. In line with the beliefs and conceptions about research discussed above, teachers' main incentives for reading research are focused around finding new ideas for teaching or solving problems in their classes. Some of the participants *have to* read published as a requirement of their study programmes. On the other hand, time and access to published research as well as the perceived impracticality of research are the main reasons behind lack of engagement in reading research. Unlike expected or sometimes reported in the literature (see chapter 2), published research is not difficult to understand as the responses to the questionnaire show (see table 4.11 above).

However, conducting TR is not as common as reading research. Only about half of the participants who read research engage in doing TR as indicated in table 4.12 above. Similarly, reasons for engagement in conducting TR are aligned with the participants' beliefs about the practicality of research: solving problems and improving practice. Time is the main reason behind not engaging in research among other reasons related to the research culture in general, discussed below.

Although 36.5% of the participants (N=19) indicated that they engage in doing research 'sometimes', the type of research described in the interview and written follow-up is close to what I described in the previous section as 'informal research'. For example, although Teacher 3 indicated that she does research 'sometimes', she explained in the written follow-up that it is 'not a 100% research, but reflection on my teaching experience and coming up with ideas for research'. Another indication that the type of research is 'informal' is that 5 out of the 19 respondents who indicated that they engage in doing research indicated earlier that they do not read research. To unravel the contradiction, I asked Teacher 3, the only participant whose answers fall in this contradictory category among the written follow-up participants, about the contradiction. Her explanation was, and as quoted above, it is more of reflection than research and that she 'rarely reads other research, follows up or goes along the whole experience of doing 'research''. Although not enough data are collected from the other participants who claimed engagement in doing TR research but not reading it (see chapter 6 for a discussion of the limitations), it can be

hypothesised that it is similar to what Teacher 3 described above, ‘informal research’, in which a teacher tries adapts ideas and approaches. Probably those 5 responses should be discredited from the ‘doing research’ category if we take research to be an iterative and communicative process that is built on what is already known, and established in the field rather than done in vacuum or isolation of other works (see chapter 6).

Finally, the only strong association between beliefs about research engagement and other variables is qualification where 78.9% of the respondents who indicated they do research (N=15 out of 19) have master degrees though this is understandable as the majority of the sample have master degrees as indicated above.

5.4 Research Culture

From the data, two main issues regarding teachers’ beliefs about the research culture emerge. First, teachers’ beliefs about research show that research is held in high esteem among the participants, even among those who are not engaged in research. For example, Teacher 5, who does not do any research, argues that ‘research should be part and parcel of any teaching and learning process. It always helps teachers find new ways to improve their approaches and ideas’. Moreover, Teacher 6, criticising the status quo at her university, maintains that ‘research should be more appreciated in [our] university, and [teachers] should be provided with the right environment, and materials to do so. This area is particularly lacking and in need of development’. Second, however, there is an apparent lack of support for research initiatives from the administrative, and stakeholders’ side (see table 4.9 above). For instance, teachers are not given time or reduced teaching hours to conduct research. Also access to up to date journals and books is not satisfactory from the teachers’ point of view. Teacher 5 identifies time as a major obstacle for doing research because ‘teaching is time consuming to the extent that it prevents me from doing the other *essential* part of learning and teaching i.e. research’ (emphasis added). Furthermore, Teacher 26 thinks that ‘There is no encouraging research atmosphere around!’ and Teacher 32 concludes the questionnaire with ‘my employer doesn’t courage me to do research at all’. Also, Teacher 4 provides a comprehensive critique of her research culture offering an example:

Although the management mentioned the importance of doing research in the past five years so many times, no *real* efforts were exerted either to initiate or to encourage research on the organizational level. For example, no incentives were offered for people to conduct research and even people who needed time off work to travel to conferences or to work on certain projects in mind were not given leave. Some

individual attempts were at first *verbally* encouraged, but motivation was not sustained. (Original emphasis)

In such a situation, research in the context of this study is not a characteristic of teachers' work and, unless teachers have to do it, there is very little research done as Teacher 6 explains, 'the only people who talk about research are mostly MA students; in other words they talk about and do research because they have to'. In this way, research, instead of being a developing and emancipatory tool aimed at improving practice, is conceptualised as an extra burden on teachers' shoulders. Poor top-down support and appreciation for research in Syrian higher education second language education contexts results in weak uptake by teachers. Also strict managerial measures leave teachers with very limited space to do anything other than teach the required curricula. Teacher 1 says that the management 'always insists that we should finish the required part of the course book and if we want to do any kind of activity they may object'. A natural reaction is that teachers, especially those who believe that research is significant for their work, become 'consumers' of research as Teacher 7 puts it. Consuming research simply implies reading research and probably trying to find and adapt ideas for teaching at best.

5.5 Impact of Research on Practice

Teacher's beliefs herein are discussed in regards to the impact of research on practice. Concrete examples about impact of research on practice were limited to 2 teachers (Teachers 2 and 4) out of the total of 52 (accounting for 3.8%) where the former changed the way she taught writing because of the research she read and the latter started using more authentic materials and improving classroom management. Surprisingly, the research teachers had to do during their programmes of study - and were doing at the time of this study - did not translate into tangible impact on practice mainly because, as Teacher 6 highlighted, teachers have to do it, not want to do it. The assessed research that teachers do in their programmes of study is conceptualised as a requirement for that programme, not as a preparation for more future research which involves deliberation and reflection on practice. It is an unreflective and unsustainable usually one-off pursuit as it does not have lasting influence on teachers' practices nor on their beliefs about research itself. Even with the type of impact Teachers 2 and 4 referred to where teachers find ideas and implement them in their classes, it is hard to tell, given the scope and time limits of this study, whether this type of impact is sustainable or not and whether it is accompanied by deeper level of impact on awareness and understanding or not.

5.6 Summary of Findings

There is incongruence and inconsistency between teachers' beliefs about research and the actual 'research' they do. A positivistic, traditional scientific approach, on the one hand, is what participants in this study believe research should be; however, what they reported doing is the 'informal' personal type in which a teacher implements and tests new ideas in his or her classes or simply adjust their teaching practices. Still, teachers believe that this activity is, or constitutes, research. Moreover, practicality of research or the ability to extract adaptable ideas is highly significant for the teachers in this study. Also, the number of participants is equally important and should be big enough to cover the varieties of the researched phenomenon/topic. Engagement in doing research is not as common as engagement in reading it, knowing that the reported engagement in doing is limited to the 'informal' type. The research culture is not conducive to engagement in research as there is little support from the administration and the assessed research that teachers did/were doing did not seem to translate into sustainable or impactful practice. The impact of research engagement on practice is also limited and represented in change of behaviour with no evidence whether it is sustainable and/or whether it is accompanied by an everlasting impact on cognition and beliefs.

Chapter 6: Limitations and Implications

6.1 Introduction

This chapter considers some methodological issues associated with this research. It also discusses the limitations of the research and implications for future research.

6.2 Methodological Issues

Given the time frame, scope and contextual issues of this research, the use of the questionnaire proved to be effective in gathering data from a relatively large sample quickly and easily. The questionnaire data provided the opportunity for the participants to engage in thinking about research, expressing their beliefs and conceptions about its various characteristics and critiquing their research culture. The written follow-up and interviews also provided a venue to explore some salient issues relevant to the research questions such as the notion of 'informal research' and the research culture and ultimately illuminate understanding about these issues. Thinking about the quality of data I gathered from interviews and written follow-up now, I believe that the later proved to be deeper in engagement in the questions posed and more reflective. The telephone interviews are, in general, (1) not easy to transcribe due to the inferior quality of recording compared to in person interviews and (2) the level of engagement in the interview, though adequate, could have been deeper if it had been in-person interviews. Also, the interviews could have been enhanced if the same participant had been interviewed more than once for shorter periods knowing that towards the end of the 50/60-minute interview, both interviewer and interviewee were fatigued. If I were to conduct similar research, I would use both questionnaire and in-depth in-person interviews in order to guarantee good quality of the data and be able to arrange for multiple interviews, if needed, to enable me to fully explore relevant issues in the study.

6.3 Limitations of Research and Implications for Future Research

This research sought to explore teachers' beliefs and conceptions about TR. Participants were 52 English language teachers from 3 universities in Syria. Hence, in view of the nature and size of the sample, the findings cannot be generalised to other contexts. Additionally, this research focused only on English language teachers due to (1) time constraints (2) the relative ease of access and (3) less work involved as no translation was

required with this sample. Future research should consider whether teachers from a variety of disciplines have similar/divergent beliefs and conceptions about TR and why.

One of the drawbacks of this research was that it was not possible, mainly because of time constraints, to further explore the research participants indicated they engaged in. An ample number of participants reported engagement in doing research in the questionnaire; however, it was not possible, especially that this study is carried out by distance, to know more about their research engagement or evidence of doing it. Another drawback is that it was not possible to fully explore some of the inconsistencies, such as the one where teachers reported engagement in doing but not in reading research, to validate participants' responses. Moreover, in such a study, the focus was on what teachers thought research is, and how much they were engaged in; however, an exploration of how the beliefs and conceptions of research were formed and sustained could have enriched our understanding about the research questions. The implication here for future research is to try and explore how research, probably in teacher preparation and postgraduate programmes is introduced and how teachers define, interact and respond to the role of being classroom researchers.

Another limitation of this study is that it did not look at the administrative perspective of research engagement. Although participants in this study provided accounts about the role of the administration in facilitating/impeding research, these accounts were not validated or examined from the administrative perspective. It would have most probably provided richer insights to examine the research provision and its status from the administrative point of view. Therefore, consideration needs to be given to the inclusion of the administrative perspective in future research.

A final limitation that I want to highlight is the one related to the context of this study itself. As I discussed in chapter 3, the deteriorating political situation was the main reason behind not being able to conduct fieldwork for this study and the ensuing methodological choices and issues highlighted above. The contextual limitations are, unfortunately, inevitable and although it was possible to conduct the research by distance for this introductory research, it is most probably impractical to plan the future PhD research in the same context if the political situation persists.

6.4 Conclusion

The study has explored teachers' beliefs about research as well as their level of research engagement. The literature review looked at beliefs as complex constructs and highlighted their importance in understanding how teachers responded to and engaged in TR. The literature review also detailed the importance of TR as a learning and professional development tool for teachers. Questionnaires, interviews and written follow-up were used to unravel beliefs and conceptions about research. The findings revealed two levels of research, the first is what research should be and the other is what participants conceived of the activities they engaged in. However, the nature of this study, the time frame and the contextual factors forced some limitations that should be considered in further research. Thus, consideration should be given to exploring participants perceived research experiences as well as the role of teacher education programmes in forming and sustaining beliefs about research to provide richer research insights.

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Appendix 1: The Questionnaire

Section 1: CHARACTERISTICS OF RESEARCH

Q1 - Here is a list of research characteristics.

Select one option to indicate your belief for each characteristic. Please give your quick first impression here.

	Unimportant (1)	Moderately important (2)	Neither important nor unimportant (3)	Important (4)	Very important (5)
A large number of people are studied (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A large volume of information is collected (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Experiments are used (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Hypotheses are tested (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Information is analysed statistically (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Questionnaires are used (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The researcher is objective (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The results apply to many ELT contexts (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The results are made public (conference, journal article, workshop, etc) (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The results give teachers ideas they can use (10)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please add a comment

Section 2: SCENARIOS

The purpose of this section is to elicit your views on the kinds of activities which can be called research. Remember: there are no right or wrong answers. Read each description below carefully and choose one answer to say to what extent you feel the activity described is an example of research. Please comment on each scenario in the box provided.

Q2 - A group of teachers decided that they wanted to change the English course books they were using. They reported their concerns to the head of the department who divided them into small groups and assigned roles to assess the weak points of the old book and write up a report. A series of workshops was set up to discuss the reports and the final decision was to change the course books.

Please select one only

- ☐ Definitely not research (1)
- ☐ Probably not research (2)
- ☐ Probably research (3)
- ☐ Definitely research (4)

Please add a comment

Q3 - A teacher read about a new approach to teaching writing and decided to try it out in his class over a period of two weeks. He video recorded some of his lessons and collected samples of learners' written work. He analyzed this information then presented the results to his colleagues at a staff meeting.

Please select one only

- ☐ Definitely not research (1)
- ☐ Probably not research (2)
- ☐ Probably research (3)
- ☐ Definitely research (4)

Please add a comment

Q4 - A teacher was doing an MA course. She read several books and articles about grammar teaching then wrote an essay of 6000 words in which she discussed the main points in the readings and how it related to her English teaching.

Please select one only

- ☐ Definitely not research (1)
- ☐ Probably not research (2)
- ☐ Probably research (3)
- ☐ Definitely research (4)

Please add a comment

Q5 - A teacher gave a questionnaire about teaching grammar to all the teachers in the English department. She then did some individual and group interviews. Statistics were used to analyze the questionnaires. The teacher wrote an article about the work in an academic journal.

Please select one only

- ☐ Definitely not research (1)
- ☐ Probably not research (2)
- ☐ Probably research (3)
- ☐ Definitely research (4)

Please add a comment

Q6 - Two teachers were both interested in improving classroom management and discipline. They observed each other's lessons once a week for three months and made notes about how they controlled their classes. They discussed their notes and wrote a short article about what they learned for the newsletter of the National Language Teachers' Association.

Please select one only

- ☐ Definitely not research (1)
- ☐ Probably not research (2)
- ☐ Probably research (3)
- ☐ Definitely research (4)

Please add a comment

Q7 - To find out which of two methods for teaching vocabulary was more effective, a teacher first tested two classes to assess their vocabulary. Then for four weeks she taught vocabulary to each class using a different method. After that she tested both groups again and compared the results to the first test. She decided to use the method which worked best to improve students' vocabulary in her own teaching.

Please select one only

- ☐ Definitely not research (1)
- ☐ Probably not research (2)
- ☐ Probably research (3)
- ☐ Definitely research (4)

Please add a comment

Q8 - Mid-way through a course, a teacher gave a class of 30 students a feedback form. The next day, 9 students handed in their completed forms. The teacher read these and used the information to decide what to do in the second part of the course.

Please select one only

- ☐ Definitely not research (1)
- ☐ Probably not research (2)

- ☐ Probably research (3)
☐ Definitely research (4)
Please add a comment

Q9 - A teacher noticed that her students' writing was almost a translation from Arabic. She read about the issue and found some practical ideas. She adopted the ideas in her own class while making notes and keeping copies of the writings. Afterwards, she reflected on the notes and writings and found considerable change in students' written production. She decided to present her experience in a conference.

Please select one only

- ☐ Definitely not research (1)
☐ Probably not research (2)
☐ Probably research (3)
☐ Definitely research (4)

Please add a comment

Q10 - A concern of some English language teachers is how to mark written work consistently. For this purpose, they spent 3 months attending workshops to discuss different ways of marking students' writing. Then they worked in small groups to develop consistent criteria for marking writing that they thought would improve their practice and they presented their results to other colleagues.

Please select one only

- ☐ Definitely not research (1)
☐ Probably not research (2)
☐ Probably research (3)
☐ Definitely research (4)

Please add a comment

Q11 - A teacher interviewed a student once a week for a whole semester in order to understand the learning strategies this student was using to improve her English. The teacher analysed the interviews and presented his findings at an education conference.

Please select one only

- ☐ Definitely not research (1)
☐ Probably not research (2)
☐ Probably research (3)
☐ Definitely research (4)

Please add a comment

Section 3: RESEARCH CULTURE

Q12 - Please give your opinion about the general attitude to research in your university

Please select one only in each row:

	Disagree strongly (1)	Disagree (2)	Don't know (3)	Agree (4)	Agree strongly (5)
Teachers carry out research themselves (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teachers feel that doing research helps them with their job (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The management encourages teachers to do research (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teachers have access to up-to-date research books and journals (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teachers have opportunities to learn about current research, (e.g. seminar and workshops	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Disagree strongly (1)	Disagree (2)	Don't know (3)	Agree (4)	Agree strongly (5)
each term, discussion groups, etc) (5)					
Teachers talk about research (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teachers are given support to attend ELT conferences (fees paid, time off, etc) (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Time for doing research is built into teachers' workloads (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teachers read published research (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Section 4: READING RESEARCH

Q13 - How often do you read published language teaching research?

Please select one only

- ☐ Never (1)
- ☐ Rarely (2)
- ☐ Sometimes (3)
- ☐ Often (4)

You chose Sometimes or Often, type in the space provided what you mean exactly by sometimes or often (e.g. once a month, two articles every semester ...etc)

You indicated that you read published language teaching research often or sometimes. Which of the following do you read?

(Please select all that apply and add others not mentioned in the space provided)

- ☐ Books (1)
- ☐ Academic journals (e.g. TESOL Quarterly) (2)
- ☐ Professional journals (e.g. ELT Journal) (3)
- ☐ Professional magazines (e.g. ET Professional) (4)
- ☐ Newsletters (e.g. IATEFL SIG Newsletters) (5)
- ☐ Web-based sources of research (6)
- ☐ Other, Please specify: (7) _____

To what extent does the research you read influence, or change, your teaching?

Please select one only

- ☐ It has no influence on what I do in the classroom (1)
- ☐ It has a slight influence on what I do in the classroom (2)
- ☐ It has a moderate influence on what I do in the classroom (3)
- ☐ It has a fairly strong influence on what I do in the classroom (4)
- ☐ It has a strong influence on what I do in the classroom (5)
- ☐ Other. Please comment: (6)_____

You indicated that you read published research rarely or never. Here are some possible reasons for this.

(Please select all reasons that are true for you)

- ☐ I am not interested in research (1)
- ☐ I do not have time (2)
- ☐ I do not have access to books and journals (3)
- ☐ I find published research hard to understand (4)
- ☐ Published research does not give me practical advice for the classroom (5)
- ☐ Other, Please specify: (6)_____

Section 5: DOING RESEARCH

Q14 - How frequently do you do research yourself?

Please select one only

- ☐ Never (1)
- ☐ Rarely (2)
- ☐ Sometimes (3)
- ☐ Often (4)
- ☐

You chose Sometimes or Often, type in the space provided what you mean exactly by sometimes or often (e.g. once every semester, once a year ...etc)

You indicated that you do research often or sometimes. Below are a number of possible reasons for doing research.

(Please select all the reasons which are true for you) 'I do research ...

- ☐ As part of a course I am studying on (1)
- ☐ Because I enjoy it (2)
- ☐ Because it is good for my professional development (3)
- ☐ Because it will help me get a promotion (4)
- ☐ Because my employer expects me to (5)
- ☐ Because other teachers can learn from the findings of my work (6)
- ☐ To contribute to the improvement of the institute generally (7)
- ☐ To find better ways of teaching (8)
- ☐ To solve problems in my teaching (9)
- ☐ Other. Please specify: (10)_____

You indicated that you do research rarely or never. Below are a number of possible reasons for not doing research.

(Please select all the reasons that are true for you) 'I don't do research because ...

- ☐ I do not know enough about research methods (1)
- ☐ My job is to teach not to do research (2)

- ☐ I do not have time to do research (3)
- ☐ My employer discourages me (4)
- ☐ I am not interested in doing research (5)
- ☐ I need someone to advise me but no one is available (6)
- ☐ Most of my colleagues do not do research (7)
- ☐ I do not have access to the books and journals I need (8)
- ☐ The learners would not co-operate if I did research in class (9)
- ☐ Other teachers would not co-operate if I asked for their help (10)
- ☐ Other reasons. Please specify: (11)_____

Section 6: ABOUT YOURSELF

Q15 - Years of experience as an English language teacher

Please select one only

- ☐ 0 - 4 (1)
- ☐ 5 - 9 (2)
- ☐ 10 - 14 (3)
- ☐ 15 - 19 (4)
- ☐ 20 - 24 (5)
- ☐ 25+ (6)

Q16 - Qualification relevant to ELT:

(Please select all that apply)

- ☐ Certificate (1)
- ☐ Diploma (2)
- ☐ Bachelor's (3)
- ☐ Master's (4)
- ☐ Doctorate (5)
- ☐ Other. Please specify: (6)_____

Q17 - How would you describe your work as an English language teacher?

Please select one only

- ☐ I teach English full-time (1)
- ☐ I teach English part-time (2)

Q18 - Type of institution you teach English in most often

Please select one only

- ☐ Private (1)
- ☐ Public (2)
- ☐ Other. Please specify: (3)_____

Q19 - Gender

- ☐ Male (1)
- ☐ Female (2)

Q20 - Age

- ☐ 20 - 29 years (1)
- ☐ 30 - 39 years (2)

- ☐ 40 - 49 years (3)
- ☐ 50 - 59 years (4)
- ☐ over 60 (5)

And finally...

Q21 - Please feel free to add comments/feedback on specific questions or issues related to this questionnaire.

Q22 - Are you willing to be contacted about possible future participation?

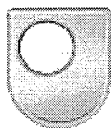
- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ Maybe (2)
- ☐ No (3)

If yes, please provide the following information

Name: (1) _____

Email: (2) _____

Appendix 2: Ethical Approval



The Open University

From Dr Duncan Banks
Chair, The Open University Human Research Ethics Committee
Email d.banks@open.ac.uk
Extension 59198

To Subhi Ashour, CREET
Subject "Teachers' beliefs about research: a Syrian case"
Ref HREC/2011/#1124/1
Red form
Submitted 1 May 2012
Date 25 May 2012

Memorandum

This memorandum is to confirm that the research protocol for the above-named research project, as submitted for ethics review, is approved by the Open University Human Research Ethics.

Please make sure that any question(s) relating to your application and approval are sent to Research-REC-Review@open.ac.uk quoting the HREC reference number. We will endeavour to respond as quickly as possible so that your research is not delayed in any way.

At the conclusion of your project, by the date that you stated in your application, the Committee would like to receive a summary report on the progress of this project, any ethical issues that have arisen and how they have been dealt with.

Regards,

Dr Duncan Banks
Chair OU HREC

The Open University is incorporated by Royal Charter (number RC 000391), an exempt charity in England & Wales and a charity registered in Scotland (number SC 038302)

HREC_2011-#1124-Ashour-1

Appendix 3: Informed Consent Form

Teachers' Beliefs About Research

Dear ^forename^

PLEASE READ CAREFULLY BEFORE ANSWERING THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The aims of the research are to explore teachers' views, practices and beliefs about research as a professional development activity. The purpose of the project is to investigate what types of research, as an English language teacher, you are familiar with and what activities you consider to be research.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete a questionnaire and you may be invited to a follow-up interview. The interview will be audio-recorded. Your participation in this research is voluntary and you can withdraw at any time. You do not have to give a reason for withdrawing from the research and there will be no negative consequences, neither from the researcher nor from your university, if you decide to withdraw.

When I report on the research, I will ensure that the data will be anonymous. No reference to personal names will be used. I am the only person who will have access to the data collected for the project. Any data I use in reports or publications, or conference presentations will be made anonymous. If you wish to have a copy of the final report sent to you, I will arrange for this to be done.

Finally, for the purpose of this project, kindly do not share the survey link with anyone.

If you have a disability or additional requirement which makes it difficult for you to complete this questionnaire, then please contact the Survey Office by email: IET-Surveys@open.ac.uk or telephone them on +44 (0)1908 652422/652423.

Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this project.

Subhi Ashour
The Open University

subhi.ashour@open.ac.uk
01908 332218

Data Protection Information: This project is administered under the OU's general data protection policy guidelines, which can be seen here: <http://www3.open.ac.uk/our-student-policies/pdf/dataprotection.pdf>

The Open University is incorporated by Royal Charter (RC 000391), an exempt charity in England & Wales and a charity registered in Scotland (SC 038302)

Appendix 4: Evaluation of research scenarios

Research		
Participant	Type of data	Teacher's input
Teacher 1	Questionnaire	'since the workshops will tackle the weak, and strong points in the course book, it will definitely involve some discussion about the teachers' practices and ways of teaching some items
Teacher 2	Questionnaire	It depends on how organized, and carefully the decision was made. If they looked at some books, compared, and analyzed then it is research. Also, if they consulted literature, and took into consideration students' need. In short, how deep it went
Teacher 5	Questionnaire	'I think yes it is a research because it involves finding causes behind a problem (i.e. the current book is not suitable enough), and after analyzing them they've come up with a solution.
Teacher 6	Questionnaire	I think it's action research carried by a group of teachers.
Teacher 6	Interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action research is research done by teachers for self-development, class development, or watching the way teachers act in the classroom, and how students react. • This scenario is research because there was a problem, and they tried to solve it based on some kind of theory, and they tested this theory, and I don't know about the result but they've done some workshops as well, workshops as a kind of publication.
Teacher 7	Questionnaire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think there should have been a questionnaire so that teachers individually reflect on the course books.
Teacher 7	Interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When you put those teachers in smaller groups, and they talk to each other, and they come up with a conclusion. • Some people don't feel comfortable expressing their opinions in meetings or in groups. • Therefore, using a questionnaire is a good way to give some space for people to express their opinions especially in a situation like this scenario.
Teacher 8	Questionnaire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As the weak points were studied carefully within groups this should include some analysis., and as the teachers used this course book so they might be making use of their own experience which might be considered an informal research.
Teacher 9	Questionnaire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since the groups of teachers have a mission now which is evaluating the course book, they are going to research, and explore its effectiveness. That's why all the activities they will do are part of research.
Teacher 10	Questionnaire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Here, we have a group of teachers identifying a problem, and trying to find a solution. The task is done collaboratively, and analysis of the cons of the old series are discussed, and studied to find a better replacement.
Teacher 11	Questionnaire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some information has been collected. A result has been concluded out of the available data.
Teacher 12	Questionnaire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One component of researching is collecting, and reporting information
Not Research		
Teacher 13	Questionnaire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The teachers analysing or assessing the old book do not collect the data for a research, but for course change.
Teacher 14		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers' concerns, reports, and workshops are not the only factors that would build research, I think.

Teacher 15	Questionnaire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think it's not enough to do so because we should involve the students in this process. In other words, the teachers' viewpoints should be based on what the course book offers in comparison with the students' needs. What the students think of the efficiency of the book is so important to be taken into consideration in order to make the right decision about the change that should be made.
Teacher 16	Questionnaire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is important to notice that setting up workshops is not a well selected method of research to investigate whether to change the textbook or not. There are many factors affecting the credibility of this method; number of teachers involved, issues discussed, time issue etc.
Teacher 17	Questionnaire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The decision depends on what kind of feedback the teachers gave in their reports. Does this feedback depend on the teachers' subjective opinion? Does it depend on their student's performance, and reaction to the course book?
Teacher 18	Questionnaire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If they had involved students' feedback or used statistics, it would have been more of a research.
Teacher 19	Questionnaire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Because it is about changing a book you can call it anything like decision or opinion but not research.
Teacher 20	Questionnaire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It can be more like action research.

Appendix4, Table 1: Scenario 1

Research		
Participant	Type of data	Teacher's input
Teacher 1	Questionnaire	It involves recording, and analyzing so for sure it's a research.
Teacher 1	Written follow-up	The teacher intentionally analysed her data, and presented then to other teachers, So the result will be used by others
Teacher 2	Questionnaire	This is how I understand research: Trying to develop, and keep up to date with the latest developments. Also, see how you can adapt them in your context, and share the findings with other professionals...so this example is an excellent one of research.
Teacher 4	Written follow-up	I think it is definitely research because it involves a question tested by data collection, and data analysis
Teacher 5	Questionnaire	This's similar to "Action Research". This teacher might have had a problem in their class, so that's why they tried a new approach.
Teacher 6	Questionnaire	Action research again.
Teacher 8	Questionnaire	Some real class study was done there, the analysis was there.
Teacher 9	Questionnaire	This is absolutely part of research because it passed through different stages such as recording the explored aspect, collecting samples, and then analysing the information.
Teacher 10	Questionnaire	Here, we have - a change of teaching approach - testing how useful & helpful it is over a set period of time -Video recording / learners' samples = sources of data to be analysed -Coming up with some results from this action research.
Teacher 11	Questionnaire	There are results being presented which are supposed to change something in the teaching style later.
Teacher 12	Questionnaire	Apart from the time invested, and the references used to measure the accuracy of the results, research techniques, and methods are used.
Teacher 15	Questionnaire	However, in this case the teacher can't generalize the results of the research because the sample is too small [one class]. Also, two weeks is not enough to test a new strategy because we should observe the improvement of the students' writing over a longer period of time.
Teacher 21	Questionnaire	Yes, because the teacher is working on new unknown theories to confirm or refute them. He is doing so by 1. experimenting 2. observing 3. interpreting the results.

Not Research		
Teacher 18	Questionnaire	Two weeks is too short; furthermore, more than one class results would have been better.
Teacher 19	Questionnaire	This is a pilot study.
Teacher 22	Questionnaire	I am not sure that two weeks is enough for a teacher to validate the appropriateness of a new writing approach.

Appendix4, Table 2: Scenario 2

Research		
Participant	Type of data	Teacher's input
Teacher 10	Questionnaire	Reviewing the literature -linking what has been read to one's teaching context
Teacher 12	Questionnaire	Also, one component of researching is reading, analyzing, and writing.
Not Research		
Teacher 1	Questionnaire	Most probably it'll mainly be theoretical study without real application in the classroom.
Teacher 2	Questionnaire	I see research as a situation where you study a problem or when you want to improve an existing situation.
Teacher 5	Questionnaire	Reading, and summarizing points in books doesn't have any kind of analysis or new results
Teacher 5	Interview	My understanding of research is not only to read, and read about something, and then write an essay because she read books, and articles, and then she wrote an essay of 6000 while she didn't do any analysis of what she has read. At least analyzing or trying a new idea or trying a new approach on a group of students, or teachers or she did a workshop. So that's why I think it's not a research. It's not practical.
Teacher 6	Questionnaire	But it depends. If she wanted to challenge certain hypothesis, and thus gathered the needed materials to do so then it's research. But if she just wrote an essay then I don't think it's research.
Teacher 6	Interview	I think this is not a research at all. It should have at least if you want to do something theoretically, i.e. not doing or using experiments, you should at least try to compare things to each other at least bring a theory, and try to defy it or bring some examples from here, and there but just to copy, and paste theories this is not a research.
Teacher 7	Interview	She did the theoretical part but she lacked the practical part, that's why It's probably not research.
Teacher 7	Questionnaire	It's only a kind of reflection.
Teacher 9	Questionnaire	Nothing practical was done.
Teacher 11	Questionnaire	It is a collection of some notes, and information about a certain topic. There is no result which will change something in the teaching style later.
Teacher 22	Questionnaire	I can't see the research hunch nor the research tools in the above scenario. We can always read, and relate things. What about the context variables? Did she take the contextual factors into account?
Teacher 23	Questionnaire	This is a personal reflection.
Teacher 24	Questionnaire	Reading articles and providing critique is useful for researchers, but without data (whether from books or real life) it's still theoretical, and therefore needs to be followed by practical steps.
Teacher 25	Questionnaire	no practical application

Appendix4, Table 3: Scenario 3

Research		
Participant	Type of data	Teacher's input
Teacher 1	Questionnaire	using questionnaires, and analyzing them is one important part of researching
Teacher 1	Written follow-up	the students, and the class where not included
Teacher 2	Questionnaire	But two points might be missing here: an existing problem i.e. a research question, and also how it relates to existing literature
Teacher 4	Written follow-up	I think it is definitely research because it involves a question tested by data collection, and data analysis
Teacher 6	Interview	She collected from data, and there is a clear methodology, analysed data, and published it. This is good-quality research.
Teacher 11	Questionnaire	This is what a research is all about; collecting some data, analyzing them, and coming up with a certain conclusion.
Teacher 14	Questionnaire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is probably research because statistics were used to analyse students' opinions, and the findings have been written in an article as a product of the whole study process. • However, the number covered is not sufficient to build some results on which, I think.
Teacher 18	Questionnaire	Involved many people, and also involved facts, and statistics
Teacher 20	Questionnaire	It can be like a case study, but more research tools should also consider students as subjects
Teacher 22	Questionnaire	It sounds as research. However, since it was about 'teaching' grammar, didn't she need to give questionnaires to the learners as well?
Teacher 23	Questionnaire	It is very plausible, but the amount of information is not big enough.
Not Research		
Teacher 21	Questionnaire	We are not discussing ideas, we are listing facts, and analysing them. Now, if we use this study, and interpret its results to prove or refute a theory, then that would be more of a research.

Appendix4, Table 4: Scenario 4

Research		
Participant	Type of data	Teacher's input
Teacher 2	Written follow-up	Because I see a research as dealing with problems, and trying to solve them. This is what the teachers were doing. They also published this for the greater benefit. However, I can say that this is informal research because it did not follow conventions, and they did not read to see what there is in the literature.
Teacher 4	Written follow-up	For me this is more like sharing experiences through peer observation. No scientific method is involved in the process here.
Teacher 5	Questionnaire	A very small-scaled research but as long as the results are published then others can make use of it.
Teacher 11	Questionnaire	They have not changed anything in their teaching style.
Teacher 13	Questionnaire	giving the results to the Association has endowed the personal experience with the characteristics of a research.
Teacher 14	Questionnaire	This research went through the steps of observation, then taking notes, then discussion, then writing the findings in an article.
Not Research		
Teacher 1	Questionnaire	here only the teachers are involved using their notes only
Teacher 8	Questionnaire	A bit informal
Teacher 19	Questionnaire	I think you can call this as : Observation
Teacher 20	Questionnaire	just peer observation, and assessment

Appendix4, Table 5: Scenario 5

Research		
Participant	Type of data	Teacher's input
Teacher 1	Questionnaire	I think this is very interesting, and effective way to know the best method because it involves theory, applying, testing, and comparing.
Teacher 2	Written follow-up	She gathered data, experimented, assessed, and then found some result, and worked accordingly to improve her way, and to render her teaching more effective. This is what research is all about. However, I think sharing is missing this this experience(presenting, publishing.....)
Teacher 3	Written follow-up	Although she didn't publish the results or made it public ... she assessed, and proposed a new method which was applied in the class afterwards.
Teacher 4	Written follow-up	It is definitely research of course because it is about testing the suitability of teaching methods within a certain context. To prove which one is best here data is gathered through tests, and compared.
Teacher 5	Interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's probably a research because she tried something new; she wanted to try something new in order to help her students to learn the vocabulary in a more effective way so I think it's probably research. • But I still insist on the idea of the number of people should be bigger.
Teacher 6	Interview	Yes, this is research because she used two groups, two different groups, right? Both groups again. She tested two different methods, and then she compared the results.
Teacher 10	Questionnaire	Action research.
Teacher 11	Questionnaire	The teacher is testing a certain hypothesis. Upon doing the experiment, she decided to adopt one method not the other. The experiment itself highlighted to the Teacher 20 that one is more effective.
Teacher 14	Questionnaire	This is probably research as the teacher has used the results of both classes in responding to teaching vocabulary, and applied the most efficient one. However more time, and more students would give more reliability to the research.
Teacher 19	Questionnaire	It is new way of teaching, and through which you can find out the weak points in your students, and improve them, in this way you can make your class an ideal one.
Teacher 24	Questionnaire	Even though she thinks it's the best method, it might not work with her students since it's a different context. Therefore, she could have tried both methods with her own students, and accordingly she can judge which one works best for them.
Not Research		
Teacher 7	Questionnaire	One class isn't enough to build a theory on. Keeping in mind that each class has its own culture, level, needs, etc?
Teacher 13	Questionnaire	Personal teaching experience
Teacher 23	Questionnaire	Very limited.

Appendix4, Table 6: Scenario 6

Research		
Participant	Type of data	Teacher's input
Teacher 1	Questionnaire	We can consider this the first step of research.
Teacher 24	Questionnaire	It could be part of a research study, when the aim of the researcher is not just to observe but to change the context
Not Research		

Teacher 2	Questionnaire	Not sure how valid the feedback was for the teacher. The information is not reliable since less than half participated. this not research it is more like feedback
Teacher 5	Interview	This is a kind of feedback that almost all teachers do continuously in their classes.
Teacher 7	Questionnaire	Less than one third of the number of students is Definitely NOT sufficient to build on, and adopt a teaching method or strategy.
Teacher 8	Questionnaire	This has to do with his class, and only this one; the results can't be used with other groups of students.
Teacher 10	Questionnaire	This can be a needs analysis. This is studying, and analyzing students' needs, wants to meet their expectations, and better their performance.
Teacher 11	Questionnaire	The teacher has used only the papers of some students. The results are definitely unreliable.
Teacher 13	Questionnaire	Personal teaching experience.
Teacher 14	Questionnaire	I think this is part of reflective teaching not research.
Teacher 18	Questionnaire	The feedback was incomplete, and too soon.
Teacher 22	Questionnaire	Can the feedback of one third of the students be enough for deciding what to do? Are they the best achievers, worst ones or average ones?
Teacher 25	Questionnaire	this is a feedback not a research
Teacher 81	Questionnaire	just a kind of evaluation for self-assessment

Appendix4, Table 7: Scenario 7

Research		
Participant	Type of data	Teacher's input
Teacher 1	Questionnaire	It includes reading, applying, taking notes, and representing, and analysing the data.
Teacher 1	Written follow-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In my opinion it's very effective research. • First the problem is a common one, and it can be applied to many contexts. • Second we have different ways for researching such as knowing the problem, having some theoretical information about the issue, applying this information, and doing some experiments, applying the results again in the class, and finding some improvement. • After that presenting her experience to other teachers was an effective way of making her research public.
Teacher 2	Written follow-up	I thought this had all the components of research; identifying a problem, a plan to address it, viewing the literature, assessing and following-up, and finally publishing the findings
Teacher 3	Written follow-up	We could call it action research since she used only one class and there was no comparison between before, and after performances, I think.
Teacher 5	Interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action Research • The number of people should be bigger, however.
Teacher 10	Questionnaire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action research
Teacher 11	Questionnaire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The teacher faced a certain problem. She worked in order to solve this problem in her classroom. This will reflect a certain change in her classroom later.
Teacher 25	Questionnaire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • But it should be applied to more than one class of one level.
Not Research		
Teacher 14	Questionnaire	The sample is not enough to build on even if we read hundreds of books about it

Appendix4, Table 8: Scenario 8

Research		
Participant	Type of data	Teacher's input
Teacher 5	Questionnaire	This can be called a research after the new criteria is tested on the students' writings.
Teacher 6	Interview	It's the teachers working for to improve their practice.
Teacher 7	Interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a genuine purpose for doing this: improving practice. • It is collaborative involving all teachers at this institute working to achieve something.
Teacher 9	Questionnaire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think that this can be part of research because it involved a number of teachers who met over a period of time, and presented their findings. • However, for research to be fully accomplished it should be contextualised in 'real' classes.
Not Research		
Teacher 1	Questionnaire	They only worked to decide on some criteria for suggestions, but they didn't apply it in their classes, and discussed its results.
Teacher 2	Questionnaire	This is just floating, recycling their own ideas.
Teacher 4	Written follow-up	It's more about sharing experiences to improve the quality of work.
Teacher 8	Questionnaire	It is mainly a discussion with some results.
Teacher 11	Questionnaire	This is a way to develop homogeneity in the marking criteria. However, those teachers did not come up with anything new. They are simply trying to be unanimous in marking their students' papers.
Teacher 14	Questionnaire	What is missing is involving learners in the teachers' results by piloting these results, and following up their results.
Teacher 24	Questionnaire	Because it depends on theory only, and no data collection is involved!

Appendix4, Table 9: Scenario 9

Research		
Participant	Type of data	Teacher's input
Teacher 6	Interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is a typical case study; why not do research using a small number of students or even one student? • We might get amazing results if you want sometimes. I read a research about psychology using one person, and they got really amazing results. • But for the MA, we are told to have a big number of students for our research.
Teacher 7	Questionnaire	OK, but why only one student?!
Teacher 8	Questionnaire	Case study. But for one student this might not be a good idea.
Teacher 11	Questionnaire	There is a certain result being reached after doing the interviews.
Not Research		
Teacher 1	Questionnaire	I think that conducting only interviews is not very useful.
Teacher 2	Questionnaire	I think the criteria is missing.
Teacher 5	Questionnaire	One student's learning strategy can't be generalized.
Teacher 5	Interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This student only represents him/herself. • Because a class of let's say 15 students, only 15 students, we have 15 learning strategies, and we have to include the 15 here if we want to do meaningful research. • What's the point of presenting the findings about one student in a conference?
Teacher 9	Questionnaire	I don't think that examining one case is research because the research should include a bigger number of participants.
Teacher 13	Questionnaire	Only one student might weaken the findings.
Teacher 14	Questionnaire	Again this student cannot represent but himself. Then the results cannot be extended to others.

Teacher 20	Questionnaire	The number of subjects studied, and the tools used are not enough for conducting research.
Teacher 131	Questionnaire	one student is not enough.

Appendix4, Table 10: Scenario 10